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# THE HIDDEN PICTURE.

A *Nobel*.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

BY

CARRICK F. BRODIE.

There are more things in heaven and earth, than our philosophy  
dreams of.

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VOL. II.

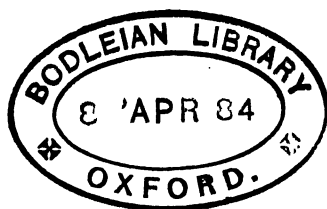
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## CHAPTER I.

IN this manner the summer months had melted away and brought the year to the last day of October, the vigil of the great festival of All Saints, which even in Protestant countries has still many legends and superstitions attached to it, and among Roman Catholics is one of the most important and mysterious of their anniversaries.

On this night both good and evil are powerful upon the earth. Many believe that during these twenty-four hours the spirits of the just made perfect, and those lofty beings who have never been necessitated to pass through the ordeal of human existence, band themselves together to overcome the powers of darkness and wrest from them the living souls which they have been seeking to entrap and destroy. All good Catholics delight to do honour to so important an occasion by every means which they can devise. The bells from the churches rang unceasingly all day, the peasants were in gala costume, and the higher classes likewise in their richest and most becoming dresses. It was for this reason that Nina was walking in the wilderness, in snow white robes of costly silk and gauze, everywhere looped and banded with magnificent jewels. Nina always chose white

for her favourite colour. She had done it in the first instance as considering herself dedicated to the Virgin ; and though for some time past those private vows had faded from her mind, or been looked upon as a slight obstacle, easy to remove, she still retained her predilection for white, being in accordance with her own simple taste, and also especially suited to her appearance ; for her marble skin and rich fitting colour, together with her jet-black hair and shining eyes, when placed in a setting of snow-white, transparent drapery, formed a picture that might have animated the statues of the heathen gods adorning Madama Capri's flower garden.

Indeed that lady's cameriera unhesitatingly affirmed that on one occasion when the signorina had lingered till dusk in the wilderness, and was running swiftly among the flowers to the house with just a little light from the west falling on her sweet face ; she, the cameriera, standing on the other side of the hedge, had distinctly seen the black marble statue of Narciso rise from his recumbent attitude beside the lake and follow madamigella ; but that when she reached the house the figure stood still, and in a moment vanished.

When this veracious story was repeated to the goldsmith he gave a disbelieving grunt and said —

“ Some intrusive puppy who has caught

a glimpse of her in the street and wants a second look at her pretty face."

But madama was all curiosity and astonishment.

"Are you sure, Giannetta? What makes you think it was the statue of Narciso? Were you alone? Did anyone else see it? What did you do? How did it vanish? Were you frightened? Were you near enough to distinguish one statue from another?"

"Yes, signora," volubly from Giannetta, "for Paulo, the gardener's son, had come round about the flower seeds, and I just walked to the shrubbery with him to ask the name of a queer plant growing there, and we saw madamigella walking fast in from the wilderness, and then the statue of Narciso got up, for we were close to the lake, and went after her, and I was terribly frightened, and Paulo was so brave he would have followed it; but I dared not let him leave me alone; but when it stopped I was still more frightened, thinking it might come back and meet us; and you know, madama, Father Pietro says that those old statues are only idols, and never were anything but fiends, and my heart jumped into my mouth, and I had just strength to cross myself and call out aloud, '*Ave Purissima!*' and will you believe me, madama, the thing vanished directly, and seemed to sink into the earth."

And madama listened trembling, and asked

a hundred questions, and sighed and shook her head, and told her confessor who would give no satisfactory answer.

Nina herself seemed more disturbed than might have been expected at this absurd story; but so far from being affrighted, or shunning the spot where stood, or rather lay, for it was in a reclining attitude, the statue of Narciso, it was observed that at dusk she invariably walked round the lake, if alone; if anyone were with her she never approached it.

It is getting dusk now, and Nina and her companion still stand where we left them, she leaning on the old cross above the spring, pondering Giacomo's last remark, her white arms relieved against the grey stone like models cut in Carrara marble, the diamond stars in her hair flashing and sparkling as they caught the dim light. Whether or not she had the power of animating the statues must remain an open question; but certain it is that she possessed the secret of reducing animated forms to stone, for Giacomo stands looking at her, and never so much as moves an eyelid or stirs a muscle all the time. •

She had just made up her mind as to the answer she should give, when a soft, tremulous voice, breaking through the quiet of the evening air, startled them both from their reverie.

"Giacomo, my good son," said the voice,

"you do wrong to keep our sweet flower in this falling dew, and so lightly clothed too ! See, love, I have brought you a thick mantle," and Madama Capri, a little old lady with silver hair combed away under a kerchief of costly lace, emerged from the shadow and came up to them.

"It is not cold, dear signora," said Nina, stooping to kiss the wrinkled forehead of the old lady, "the air is delicious, and we were just coming in."

"Well, gioia mia, I came to seek you, for I have got something for you. See here, is not this what you have been anxiously expecting ?" And she held up a large sealed letter.

"For me ?" cried Nina, snatching it from her hand, and in the dim light scanning the address. "Yes, it is for me, and from Father Francesco too ; ah ! what will he tell me, I am so anxious to know."

"Stop, child," said madama, deftly repossessing herself of the letter. "I want you to make me a promise. Assure me that you will not open this letter till to-morrow morning."

"Not open it till to-morrow morning ?" exclaimed Nina aghast. "Dear signora, what do you ask ?"

"I am serious, child, I have good reasons—will you promise ?"

"No, indeed," said Nina, a little impa-

tiently, "I mean to open it the moment I get it."

"Then I must not give it to you till to-morrow."

And the signora quietly put the letter in her pocket.

"Not give it to me? My own letter?" said Nina, almost angrily. "Signora, what are you thinking of?"

"Mother," said Giacomo, "are you mad?"

"No, my dear son, I am sane; but my sweet pearl will bear with the fears of an old woman who loves her. Do you not know, darling, that there are some to whom it is fatal to open a letter on All Holy Eve?"

"I never heard it," said Nina, "never. Moreover I have seen letters opened many times on that eve, and no one ever had any fear."

"You have never seen those whom I allude to open them," said madama, gravely, "for they are the daughters of your own house."

"No, certainly not," replied Nina, "for I am the only one, and I never remember receiving a letter on this day before. But, dear signora, at least let me know what is the punishment, and why?"

"I scarcely feel justified in speaking of it," said madama, looking puzzled, "yet why not? Have you never heard, carina, of the legend of your house? The legend of the veiled picture?"

"The veiled picture!" ejaculated Nina. And suddenly the recollection of the story she had heard Brandenburg telling in the balcony began to glimmer back upon her mind. "A picture," she stammered out, "in the wall, of a monk, or a nun, and some dreadful story" —

"The same—the same" — interrupted madama, "I see you have it, child, in part; the domestics doubtless told all they had heard, the good sisters also perhaps knew it; who was it that told you, dear child?"

"I scarcely know," said Nina, dreamily. She paused and passed her hand slowly over her forehead. "Something I remember, but all so strange, so vague."

A peculiar look came into her eyes. Stony, fixed, on space as if contemplating something at an immense distance. Her two companions looked at her in astonishment and alarm. With an effort, accompanied by a slight shudder, she brought herself back to the present.

"Tell me, dear madama," she said, rousing herself, "if you love me, tell me the whole. I know too little or too much. What has it to do with my letter?"

"Everything," said the old lady, shivering a little. "Perhaps I had better tell it," she murmured. "I think Father Francesco would say so. Will you promise me, dar-

ling," turning abruptly to Nina, "that if I tell you this, you will not open the letter till to-morrow?"

"If there is really any reason that I should not, I will promise," said Nina.

"Enough," said madama. "I have no fear that you will not see reason in plenty. Let me speak now quickly, for the Padrone would not like to hear it talked about. Put on the mantle, child. Giacomo, wrap her up. Let us sit on this dry stump. I am old, and cannot run about like you young things that never get tired. There, that is pleasant," as they seated themselves, and Nina laid her hand lovingly on the old lady's shoulder.

"Did you ever, my sweet, hear of your famous ancestress Nina the Beautiful?"

"I have heard of so many," said the fair Castellano, smiling, "who were all beautiful, and all called Nina."

"Ah, yes, true; but this one is distinguished from all the rest. She lived, how long ago I cannot tell, centuries, ages, Father Francesco knows, before ever the Castellani left sunny Spain; for you know, child, that your ancestors were those war-like Goths, those illustrious Hidalgos, who first united in their lives honour to all noble acts, and reverence of all holy things, and called it chivalry; before ever a Spanish king dreamed of sitting on a throne in Italy, or



Spanish nobles contemplated a possible home away from their own rugged mountains and delicious valleys. When I say that this Nina was the only child and heiress of the Castellano, and so unspeakably fair as even in that family to merit the title of 'The Beautiful,' I need scarcely add that not only the nobles but the princes of Europe sought her in marriage. But she would none of them. Why, no one could tell; but the truth was, that she had given her heart to a cousin of her own, within the prohibited degrees; and even contracted with him a clandestine marriage. This was at last discovered, but she was warned beforehand and fled from her father's house, fled from Spain, passed over the wild Sierras, through the thick forests all alone, reached Italy, came to Naples, disguised herself as a monk, obtained admittance to a house of white Carmelites, and lived there for two years. She found means to communicate with her husband, and for the sake of greater secrecy adopted the dress of a peasant girl; and by a secret entrance contrived to leave the convent and return to it undiscovered; often having occasion to meet emissaries at a distance, who brought her news from Spain.

"All this time she never saw the man for whom she had perilled so much, but he constantly sent her word that he was striving

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all in his power to set matters straight, and was quickly coming to rescue her from her perilous position.

“At last one memorable day, the vigil of All Saints, arrived a messenger with a letter. She had longed for this letter; she knew that it was to contain decisive news. It did. Her husband having risen to wealth and influence was in a position to claim his wife if he pleased. He told her this; but he also told her that he considered their marriage illegal, that he had no intention of claiming her, that their union was a sin against the Church, which he had already repaired by espousing a lady of rank, wealth, and great beauty, who was in no way connected with him by blood. That this was the last communication which he could hold with his fugitive kinswoman, and advised her to enter some obscure convent under a false name, and there hide herself for ever; threatening in case she in any way disturbed him, to denounce her to her own family and also to the Inquisition.”

“Oh, wretch!” murmured Nina, quivering with indignation and pity.

“Scoundrel!” hissed Giacomo, between his closed teeth.

“The unhappy creature,” continued Madama Capri, “did not die, or lose her reason. She remained terribly calm. She noted the day and hour that she had re-

ceived that letter; and she swore to make that day a day of woe and wailing to her whole kin. She called down a solemn curse on any daughter of her house who should read a letter, or even open one at that hour. With terrible imprecations she declared that the memory of that letter should never die, that her curse should never lose its power, as long as a Castellano lived upon the earth."

"And the hour?" gasped Nina.

"Is not precisely known, but is somewhere between sunset and dawn. Therefore it is that no daughter of the Castellano dare open a letter from the time that the shadows slope from the west until the east is red with morning. You see that I had good reason, child, for the promise that I asked from you."

Nina bent her head in her hands, and shuddered silently.

"After this," resumed madama, "the miserable being deliberately abjured her faith, trampled the cross under her feet; invoked the arch-fiend to aid her in a revenge, terrible and sure upon the recreant; and lastly, she fled away, some say of her own accord, some carried by the demons to whom she had sold herself, up to the very top of Vesuvius, and cast herself headlong into the Crater."

Madama paused, and a horrified groan broke from her listeners.

After a few moments she continued —

"The worst is to come. The horror is almost too great to tell; nevertheless it is true, beyond all contradiction. That wretched, lost creature, she lives still."

"Lives!" exclaimed Nina almost with a scream; "how—in what way?"

"Lives?" echoed Giacomo, "lives still? Folly!"

"I tell you that she lives," said madama, impressively raising her hand; "lives in her own human body, a slave to the fiends who have mastered her, forced to do their bidding, and work their wickedness upon the earth."

"But," gasped Nina, whose white lips could scarcely form the words, "how?—where? Impossible! Will not the boiling floods of Vesuvius destroy life? And through countless centuries to live? It cannot be!"

"It is true!" said the signora solemnly. "Holy and learned men have given their dying testimony to the fact. There are mysteries, child, into which we dare not look, miracles which no mortal can comprehend. Certain it is that the eve of All Saints is a day fatal to the Castellano. On the first anniversary of the miserable daughter's disappearance her father and two cousins sailing in a pleasure skiff upon a tranquil river, found themselves bewildered among unknown creeks and inlets which they

had never seen before. Suddenly a strong wind rose, and in spite of all their efforts carried them out to sea. When evening fell the wind became a hurricane; the boat was dashed to pieces; a servant who had accompanied the Duke saved himself by continually invoking his patron saint while he clung to the mast; he was cast on shore living and unhurt; the Duke and his two nephews were never seen again.

"The second anniversary was no less terrible. The cousin who had been the cause of all this misery succeeded to the title and estates. There were great rejoicings in the Castellano palace, for an heir was born, and the Duke was proud and satisfied beyond all limits. The rejoicings were over, and all the household had retired to rest. A little before midnight a wild cry rang through the chambers and galleries; the startled servitors rushed from all quarters. The cry seemed to come from the Duke's apartments. They hurried thither. The door was locked. They forced it open. The Duke lay upon the ground, his hair bristling, his eyes starting from their sockets. He was dead! The surgeons who were summoned said strangled; but there was no mark of fingers or cord upon his throat, no living creature but himself in the chamber, and no entrance beyond the door which they had broken open. But a priest who

had come from a distance to assist at the baptism of the infant heir, and was sleeping in the palace, solemnly declared that as the door fell back, and they rushed in he distinctly saw Nina the Beautiful habited as a white Carmelite monk, and holding a dagger in her hand, disappear through the opposite wall.

“The Duke’s hands were tightly clenched, his teeth set, large icy drops standing on his forehead; was it horror or agony? The physicians shook their heads, and declined to say. *Who* had murdered him, or by what means, remained a mystery. One thing only was certain—he was dead, and his death had been an awful one!”

“And was there no possible cause of death to be seen?” asked Giacomo in an undertone of awe, but true to his own nature, which was practical. “No wound? No hurt?”

“There was nothing,” replied madama, “but a tiny puncture on one wrist, a mere scraze of the skin, caused most likely by some nail or sharp corner in falling, not enough to hurt a baby; but, strange to say, before morning the whole body was black as if scathed by lightning!”

“Ever since it has been the same. The blight has never departed from the house. The vigil of All Saints has been carefully guarded by prayer and fasting, penance, and

works of charity, and not altogether without effect, but only as long as they last; the least relapse from these precautions, and misfortune falls upon the family at once. Whenever a daughter of the Castellano, careless of the prediction, has read a letter between sunset and dawn, either death, or some calamity worse than death, has overtaken the reader. And whenever death or trouble to the Castellani is at hand, the wonderful appearance is always seen, in the same dress, armed with the dagger, her face full of fury and woe. She swore that her wrongs should never be forgotten. Alas! she has kept her oath only too well!"

There was something strange and awful to Nina in the coincidence of her own appearance that fatal night in the Castellano palace, and the facts which she now heard. But she would not yield to the horror which she felt creeping over her, and a sort of agonised pity forced her to ask more questions.

"Can nothing be done for her?" she murmured; "masses for her soul, the prayers of the Church"—

Madama interrupted her quickly.

"Hush, child, I must tell you; the Church itself has condemned her. The Church laid its eternal curse upon her when her crimes became known. It is forbidden to any good Catholic to pray for her, or even mention her name in any holy place. Were it not for

that, it has been said—that is, I have heard—at least it is surmised—that by the undergoing of a great penance she might yet make her atonement, and obtain pardon. Indeed there is a prediction that she will yet accomplish it, die truly reconciled to the Church, and even be buried with the holiest ceremonies under the altar-stone of a chapel dedicated to Our Lady.”

“But tell me,” interrupted Nina in great agitation, “how do you mean that she will yet die? Can you believe it possible that her mortal body yet exists? Where—how does she live? If she *has* a mortal body it must have a habitation; she must bear a name; she must be somebody’s child. Who knows her? What proof is there that she *does* exist? How can such a monstrous life be possible? Ah!” she continued sobbing with pity and terror, “her penance has been terrible already. Is it not enough? Can nothing be done to help her?”

“Oh! my darling, hush,” exclaimed madama hysterically, clasping Nina’s hands; “you must not ask such questions; we know nothing of these mysteries; we cannot explain miracles. This much I can tell you. She cannot obtain pardon because she will not give up her revenge; she continues to visit the crimes of the guilty upon the innocent; she will not submit and leave vengeance in the hands of the Most Holy. Alas! what



*can* be done? I fear nothing. But I must finish this miserable tale. I could tell you endless legends of her various reappearances on the earth, so mystical and bewildering that it would puzzle your young brains to comprehend them.

“Ages passed away. The Castellani, following the fortunes of their conquering Prince, migrated from Spain to Italy. The spectre, apparition, vampire, what can I call it, went with them. Strange to say, the then Duke Castellano received among other rewards for his fidelity a grant of land, upon which, finding some foundations ready laid, he built a palace. It was afterwards discovered to be the site of the very monastery where Nina the Beautiful had lived. Her moans were heard incessantly; her white gown and gleaming dagger were constantly flitting like a baleful lightning before terrified eyes, swallowed up instantaneously in darkness, leaving the beholder scared and shivering, if not positively injured.

“A large verandah which ran almost the length of the banquet hall was her favourite haunt; it was said that on the ground below she had trampled the cross, and invoked the fiend.

“Trouble after trouble fell upon the Castellani. The house dwindled from its ancient magnificence; sickness, and sorrow, and misfortune, humbled the descendants of the

proud Castilian Hidalgos. The vengeful presence pursued and scattered them. There is one curious fact I must mention. At the time when Nina the Accursed, as she was afterwards called, lived her disguised life in Naples, there existed a religious house dedicated to Nostra Donna della Misericordia, composed entirely of French nuns, who had fled from some terrible persecution in their own country; I believe the kingdom was laid under interdict in consequence of some quarrel between the King and His Holiness. It had so happened that Nina, in her disguise as a peasant, had frequently come in contact with these good sisters, who, interested in her wonderful beauty and deep melancholy, had shown her much kindness. When her story became known, these holy women, true to the principles on which their house was founded, implored leave to aid her with their prayers. Their request was refused; but after much solicitation they were permitted to hold one solemn service once every year, in which each sister, having first undergone a severe penance, was permitted to pray for 'one apparently lost beyond redemption,' but without mentioning any name. Ages after this, it chanced that one of the sisters of this house, which still existed, was brought for some reason to attend the dying hours of a Castellano. In the evening the terrible moan

of the phantom was heard, and the white gown glimmered by the opposite wall. The attendants fled in terror, but the holy sister stood up, calm and fearless, signed the cross over the dying, and bade the revengeful spirit leave them in peace. And, marvel of marvels! the vision drooped its fierce eyes, and bowed its erect head, and melted away into air, and troubled them no more for all that year. It was said that the wretched thing was grateful, and sacrificed her revengeful longings in obedience to the Order which had tried to befriend her.

“But of late years, when one misfortune after another overtook the family, so often was the phantom seen in the verandah, that many people were frightened to madness by suddenly entering and encountering the white figure, with the ghastly face and floating hair, so that at last the Duke gave orders that the whole should be blocked up; if, therefore, the miserable spirit really inhabits a tangible body, she must abandon her chosen place of resort, if not—but I must not venture to doubt what high authority has pronounced true.

“A few holy and devoted men have tried to ascertain something of her wonderful existence, but without success. They have met and spoken to her; but from that moment reason has deserted them, and

only in the intervals of their ravings have these few facts of her history been made known.

"It is believed also that she has at various times appeared and lived upon the earth like one of us for weeks, months, perhaps years, assuming some personality which defies detection, and, it is said, that her last appearance will be as a daughter of her own house.

"During these brief intervals of repose, events have linked together some penance, terrible to undergo, but which would be, if unflinchingly endured, of healing power to the poor sick soul.

"But she has never endured, never conquered; the fiends are not likely to let their prize go, and her good angel alone has not power to overcome them. If a prayer or a blessing from a good Christian could descend upon her, it might give her strength to fight, but that can never be; none dare do it, for the curse of the Church is upon her."

"But surely," exclaimed Nina, almost with indignation, "the Church does not *wish* her eternal perdition? Why should she prevent the good and faithful from helping a weak and sinful spirit?"

"Oh, hush, dear child, hush! You must not talk in such a way. We cannot understand. Think of her crimes. The unlawful affection for her cousin—the wicked conceal-

ment—the false vows—the disgrace brought upon her kindred, her faith denied, the cross profaned, the holy saints cursed, her compact with the fiends! Is not the Church right to make her a terrible example?”

“True—true,” said Nina, with a shudder, and sorrowfully abandoning her championship; “but that prediction, mother, that she shall yet find peace, how is it to be fulfilled, if none must help her, and she cannot help herself?”

“Ah! who knows?” replied madama, sighing. “The ways of Il Buono Dio are wonderful! When she has suffered enough, some instrument will doubtless be found, and when it is, may Holy Mary give her strength to go through with it.”

In an instant madama remembered that she herself had unconsciously pronounced the forbidden blessing.

“No, no,” she almost shrieked, “I did not mean”—

But Nina threw her arms round the signora's neck, and pressed her soft cheek against the trembling lips to prevent them from opening.

“Do not unsay it, darling mother, it is no harm, you never meant to disobey the Church”—

But the frightened, priest-ridden old woman struggled with the clinging arms that held her, and tried to get out her denial.

"Mother," said Giacomo, in strong, measured tones, "don't be foolish. If there is any truth in this wonderful tale—I don't pretend to be a judge of such matters—your good wishes for the poor thing can do you no harm, and may in some way be a benefit to her. And listen," for the old lady still tried to speak, "your denial shall be useless, for here before Heaven I fervently hope and pray, that if it be true, and that poor vexed spirit have a penance to endure, may every good angel, and every holy saint, stand by her, and strengthen her, and help her to win through, and give her peace at last. She shall have *my* prayers at any rate."

"Oh, Giacomo—oh, my son," said madama disconsolately, "what have you said?"

"What I mean, mother, and would stand to if the arch fiend and the archangel stood one on each side of me. I've no fear of the former, and, as for the latter, I believe he would lend me his own sword to fight in *that* quarrel!"

"Giacomo!" exclaimed Nina, in her impulse calling him by name, while her whole face flushed and glowed with excitement, "I thank you for my unhappy ancestress. A blessing so perfect will surely prevail."

Half-admiring, half-appalled at Giacomo's bold words, madama no longer resisted, but, drawing Nina towards her, murmured timidly —

"Oh, my child, how strange, how wonderful! After more centuries than I can count—after the failure of every effort of prayer, and fasting, and penance to turn away the curse from the family; now, unasked, unexpected, the blessing has at last been pronounced; the forbidden words have been spoken—we cannot gainsay them. Heaven only knows! Perhaps she may at this moment be upon the earth—perhaps her penance is at hand, and the holy saints, forgiving and merciful, will give her strength to conquer!

"Come, my children," she continued, shivering slightly, "let us go in. The air grows chill. The Padrone has returned, and supper awaits."

She drew the letter from her pocket.

"Take it, sweet one. I know that I have said enough to prevent one, far less wise and prudent than my Nina, from opening this night the most longed for letter that ever came into a girl's hand. It will not be long to wait. When the first bell for matins is heard the curse is powerless, and the fiends, who wait to carry it out, fly from the sound which dedicates the day to the all holy."

Nina took the letter absently and without reply. The three rose and turned to leave the wilderness. After walking a few paces Nina moved her head round to the spot they had quitted, and started violently, giving a

stifled shriek at the same time. Madama, ready to be terrified, shrieked for company without knowing why.

"What is the matter? Are you hurt, Nina? What are you looking at—what do you see?" came rapidly from Giacomo.

"Nothing," stammered Nina. "I think it was a tree moving; it frightened me for a moment."

"I will soon find out," said Giacomo; and, running back, he paced all round the lake, and in and out of the bushes, calling out to his trembling companions that no living thing was there but himself. Then he came back breathless but satisfied.

"What was it that you saw, dear Nina, or thought you saw?"

"Yes, child, what did you see?" whispered madama.

"Oh, nothing, I believe," said Nina, with great agitation in her voice. "I think the legend had frightened me. The trees moving looked so ghostly in this dim light. A crescent moon makes everything so indistinct. Don't think of it any more, it was only fancy. It really is quite chilly. I think I hear someone calling us from the house."

She seemed anxious to change the subject, and walked on fast. Her companions thought her excited and nervous.

"You must not tell us any more legends,



mother," said Giacomo; "they will drive the colour from Nina's cheeks more than the night air will."

"I have no wish to tell such a tale often," said madama very gravely.

Nina made no remark. She was buried in her own thoughts, pondering on what that momentary glance had revealed to her. On the margin of the lake, relieved against the western sky, slightly illuminated by the already waning moon, stood a black figure still as a statue and apparently far beyond human height. She knew that precisely on that spot lay the black marble statue of Narciso, larger than life-size, which had figured in Giannetta's highly-coloured account of her own adventure. Amazed and unprepared she cried out, forgetting her usual caution, but at the same moment the figure vanished. In half a second Giacomo was on the spot, but no sign or sound of any living thing was there.

Nina walked on, scarce knowing where she trod; her thoughts too wild and confused for definite meaning even to herself. Giacomo was grave, the signora tired. The three entered the house in silence.

## CHAPTER II.

It wanted yet two hours of midnight, and Maestro Capri's household, which was orderly, had retired to rest.

All except Nina were probably fast asleep, but she had made no preparation for repose beyond loosening her rich hair, which streamed in dark, wavy masses almost to her knees, and, throwing a light mantle round her, had drawn aside the curtain and seated herself at the open window.

The moon, not yet full, was setting, and threw a dusky clear light upon the wilderness and garden, which her window overlooked. The shadows grouped themselves in fantastical forms, and, as the wind swayed, the trees seemed to move, and nod, and gesticulate like living things, sometimes in grave emphasis, sometimes in passionate vehemence.

For a while Nina idly watched these changes, then gradually fell into a reverie, commencing with the frightful tale she had heard that evening, and by a very easy transition glancing off to her own affairs and prospects.

Giacomo's plan for the union of French and Italians was a pleasant subject of contemplation. Certainly, in the midst of it,

the recollection of her vows shot like a spasm through her mind, but she soon recovered. "Had they not been lost sight of already?" Neither her father, nor the Priest, nor Madama Capri, nor Giacomo, though they were all aware that such vows had been taken, ever seemed to contemplate for her a religious life; indeed, on two or three occasions remarks had fallen from Giacomo which convinced her that Father Francesco must have spoken undoubtingly of marriage as her future lot.

Still Nina was too clear-headed not to know that her own conscience, and none other, would be responsible for a broken vow; so she glossed it over with specious arguments, such as —

"The Church has all power; if she commands me to retract them I must. It may be that I had no right to take those vows; perhaps they are not binding," &c., &c.

And if Giacomo's plan should be carried out, and Naples subside peacefully under her French ruler, what a vista of happiness did it not open? And with that idea came a wild longing to hear something of Claud. She recalled Giannetta's story of the moving statue, in a manner confirmed by her own eyes that very evening. She had always suspected that the black figure was Claud himself, or some emissary. Her own experience had a little shaken this belief. The

figure looked so strange and gigantic; and where could he have concealed himself so quickly? But if it was a messenger, and more especially if it *were* himself, how unfortunate that on both occasions others had been present and prevented their meeting.

"The many evenings that I have been there alone," she sighed, "and seen nothing. But he will find some other way; perhaps by a letter. But he could not send it openly. How *can* he manage it? I know that he will; he said he would; and what he says he is certain to do," she added, with a proud sense of proprietorship in the unequalled powers of this most perfect of men. "Suppose a letter *should* come? What should I say?—how account for it? No one writes to me but Father Francesco."

Her eyes fell naturally upon the letter which lay upon the table unopened. She took it up and examined the direction.

"It is Father Francesco's handwriting, undoubtedly. How thick it is! What can he have to say?"

She looked it all over, peeped in at the edges, examined the seal, weighed it in her hand. Then, while pressing it between her fingers, she paused abruptly, and something like a shock went through her. She distinctly felt *another* letter inside.

"It is an enclosure," she said breathlessly, and turning first white and then crimson.

"*Can* he have got it conveyed to Father Francesco? It is, I am sure. What else can it be? But how can he have managed it? Discovered the Padre's house, perhaps; intercepted a letter, bribed the messenger, broken the seal, put his own under the cover, sealed it up again— Ah!" pausing abruptly in her rapid enumeration of possibilities; "but how could he get the Padre's seal?"

Suddenly she rose and crossed the room to a table where burnt a silver lamp with a green shade over it to subdue the light. She placed the letter under the shade with the seal turned upward. How describe her feelings when she recognised, instead of the crozier and coronet invariably used by Father Francesco, a coronet certainly, but supported on a drawn sword—in the dim light she had not distinguished the difference—and round it a French motto, "*Ce que je gagne, je tiens.*"

She remembered Claud using those very words to her on a memorable occasion. She had one day dropped a knot of ribbon into a fissure of the rock; he had fished it up with the point of his sword, but had refused to give it back to her, laughingly repeating those very words. In explanation he told her that it was the motto of a French family connected with his own, and described the crest, a coronet on a sword's point, adding

that he highly approved of both crest and motto; he considered anything won at the sword's point it was lawful to retain.

Nina sat down and pressed her hands to her heart, which throbbed with such frightful vehemence that she thought she must certainly choke and die. There was no longer a doubt; it was a letter from Claud. She walked up and down the room to calm herself, and then sat down again at the window till the physical agitation had passed away. A peculiar coincidence of circumstances reminded her of the episode of the letter in madama's legend. The same dreamy entanglement of ideas that she had more than once felt took possession of her. She could scarcely preserve her own identity, so completely did she feel mingled with, and representing her unhappy ancestress. With a strong effort, as before, she threw off this bewilderment, rose hastily, moved to the table, and took up the letter, but suddenly paused and fell back.

"Oh, misery!" she cried; "I must not open it."

She put it back, and clenched her hands with rage and vexation.

"Oh, why did madama tell that horrible story? Why did she make me promise? How can I sleep this night without knowing what is in the letter? I must, I will know. I did *not* promise; I never spoke. I don't

believe that story. Even if it were true, what right has any dead ancestress to dictate to me? I shall not attend to it; it does not concern me."

Her indignant sympathy with the unhappy outcast of her house seemed to have melted into nothing. The mortification of not being able to open the letter had soured her all through. She knew that what she said was only false argument, and she stamped with fury because she could not hide it from herself.

"To be kept the whole night dying with anxiety! It is shameful! Madama had no right to bind me."

Madama had a right, and Nina knew it. A pause. She walked to the window. The wind had risen, the moon was very low, and the shadows were dancing wildly, twisting themselves into horrible contortions, like a medley of fiends and witches celebrating Walpurgisnacht on the top of the Brocken.

She came back to the table. Her face had changed; it was white and resolute. She took up the letter and looked all over it once more.

"I shall open it," she said aloud.

At that moment a neighbouring clock struck the hour before midnight. Nina started as if someone had spoken, and looked with scared eyes all round the chamber. Irresolute, she laid down the letter

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and walked once or twice across the room. Everything seemed quiet, and from a distance she heard the challenge of the sentries as they relieved guard. It was a cheery sound, and she recovered her self-possession. She went determinately back, lifted the letter, and put her finger under the seal.

What was that? Something cold touched her cheek, and a sigh was breathed into her ear. She started back, stumbled over a stool, and the letter fell from her hand to a distant part of the room. She almost thought it had been struck from her.

She recovered her self-possession quickly, and stood listening with eyes widely dilated, almost expecting something either of sight or sound to follow, for her nerves were strung up to an almost hysterical tension. But nothing came, and her straining muscles relaxed.

"It was the wind," she said at last, with a relieved look.

Wild gusts came sweeping in now and waved the curtains about obstreperously. She drew them tight down, and with the same resolute face came back.

"I will not be prevented," she muttered defiantly, as she picked up the letter, "nothing shall stop me."

Once more she leaned from the window. Wilder, blacker, more confused than ever, the shadows rushed, and whirled, and tore



madly up and down the dimly lighted space below. She came back, glanced all round the room, tossed her hair away, looked steadily at the letter; her face grew whiter, more resolute, almost fierce. Suddenly she took it up, and, without hesitating a moment, broke the seal. It was done now, and she forgot everything but what it might contain. Hastily she unfolded the sheets; oh, bitter disappointment! All in Father Francesco's writing. There was an enclosure certainly, but addressed to Maestro Capri.

In her first angry impulse she flung the whole pile of paper on the table.

"I shall not read it," she said, "madama may have her way."

She went to the window and leaned sullenly out, with her arms on the ledge.

"I am not going to wait for ever," she muttered angrily. "Get news of him I am determined, cost what it will."

She brooded over her disappointment, inwardly chafing.

"If I could only get out of here," she went on, "away from madama's prying eyes I could contrive something; I might make an excuse to see Father Francesco, possibly I might meet some of *them*, and if alone might make myself known, and learn something, but pent up, imprisoned as I am, how can I do anything?"

After these very unjust reflections, she pondered a little.

"How can I make a reason for going out alone? I might say that Father Francesco wished to see me; I could say afterwards that I had misunderstood, if there was anything that I could construe into that" —

It was evident that the deceptive element in Ninas nature was by no means subdued. Suddenly she sprang up.

"This very letter might give me some excuse. There might be something in it, I *will* read it after all. He must have important news to write such a long letter."

Inspired by this idea she set herself to read the letter in earnest. It ran thus —

"DEAREST DAUGHTER,

"I have long wished to communicate with you, in person if possible; failing that, by letter. The first is out of the question, and even the latter I must curtail as much as I can. I leave Naples to-day, having received a message more urgent even than I expected. I cannot give you any direct news of your noble father, but I hope shortly to see him. I have every reason to believe that he is on Italian ground but strictly concealed. I have received all the messages and letters you have sent me by Margherita, for which I thank you heartily, my dearest child. It has been the greatest happiness and conso-

lation to me to know, that you are so pleasantly located, and have become so dear to the excellent Capri family. They are indeed friends to cherish. I commend you especially to the care of my beloved son Giacomo; in every trouble and perplexity, I should wish you to ask his advice, and abide entirely by his counsel. Whatever he tells you—do. Defer to his opinions, consult his tastes, be guided entirely by him.

“You cannot prize his approbation too much, or value his regard too highly. He is one of the noblest of men, and never bestows affection except on the worthiest, and most exalted objects. And now my cherished child I come to the main object of my letter.

“Being obliged to quit Naples in this hurried manner, I am forced to leave an important and pressing duty unfulfilled.

“To you, my Nina, I confide it. To you, unskilled in the ways of the world, yet so strong, and brave, and self-dependent; so gentle, compassionate and loving, that even if I had a choice, which I have not, I should still prefer entrusting this matter to your care. A few words will explain it. I believe you are aware that my sister Carmina, married many years ago a French nobleman. It was considered a great alliance for her, though even then France was dark with the shadow of coming horrors, and the monarchy trembling to its foundations.

My sister's husband was a staunch royalist; he perished with thousands of others during the reign of terror. His widow and three children escaped miraculously to England. There two of the children died. When tranquillity was restored under the government of the First Consul, she returned to France with her remaining child, a girl. Some small remnant of her husband's property was restored to her, and she lived in strict retirement. Her daughter grew up, and formed an attachment to a young man whose family, though formerly royalist, and of the first nobility, saw no other way out of the chaos of matters, than to submit to the new dynasty. The son entered the army, and though a brave and trustworthy soldier, never forgot, and scarcely denied, his royalist principles.

“Upon the accession of the First Consul to the Imperial dignity, the cruel tyranny which he had before striven to conceal, became open and rampant. Jealous even of the most insignificant who clung to the old *régimé*, he persecuted them all without mercy. My unhappy sister and her child were compelled again to abandon their resting place and fly for their lives. Bewildered and desolate they came to Naples, principally on account of my own residence here; and though still obliged to live in concealment led a comparatively peaceful life.

"Born among the wrecks of royalty, my niece was named Fleur-de-lys, the last proof of passionate devotion which her father could give his unhappy sovereign. They had not been here long when Fleur-de-lys met by chance the man to whom she had been almost betrothed before leaving France. The intimacy was renewed, the betrothal took place, and they only waited more settled times and greater security to solemnize their marriage. Just at this time my poor sister, worn out with trouble and hardship, died, thanking Heaven that she left her child under my protection and to the future care of a good man. This cloud had scarcely begun to lift, when another came up. Fleur-de-lys betrothed fell in some way under the suspicion of the Government. We believe this to have been effected by an enemy; a vile man who had many times sued for my niece's hand, and been rejected with scorn and loathing. (I must tell you that she is considered lovely as the heathen Venus.) The man she had chosen found himself watched and dogged, and we decided that it would be the wisest plan for him to apply for service in some foreign country, one of the French colonies perhaps, where his enemy could not follow him. But he would not leave his promised wife, and he determined, therefore that the marriage should take place at once.

"I myself joined their hands, secretly at midnight in the obscure little church of San Tommaso. But alas ! our precautions were all useless. At the church door he was arrested. He was tried by the military law, but such secrecy was observed, that not one fact of the trial has transpired beyond the fatal one that he is condemned to death. I do not even know what crime he is charged with, but conclude that it must be greater even than the highest breach of discipline, as since his condemnation he has been removed to a prison reserved more for State criminals than military offenders. It is, in fact, the very prison of which Giacomo Capri is governor. I need not tell you, my gentle Nina, the state of my unhappy niece ; and you may perhaps dimly imagine the condition of my own mind at being forced to abandon her at this time to fulfil a duty which I dare not leave undone, even if she lay dying at my feet.

"It is to you, therefore, in this terrible strait that I apply. You are happily safe. Under the ample protection of the Capris no harm can accrue to you. Yet the service I ask of you is one of magnitude. It is no less than to obtain by any means you can, the liberation of my niece's husband and his safe conveyal out of this country. When I say 'liberation,' I should rather say 'eva-

sion,' for no means but escape will ever release him from his prison. If it cannot be arranged for his wife to accompany him, shelter and befriend her till a safe and fitting means is found for her to join him.

"I know, my child, your fertile intellect, your ready wit, and your powers of self-control. Spare neither pains nor money. I have written, as you will see, to Maestro Capri, instructing him that I have given you an important mission to accomplish, and that he shall supply you without question with any sums which you may choose to demand. He has good security from me. Margherita will be an excellent assistant to you. She knows all the ways of the city, and is wise and silent. To your own invention I must leave the means. Do not make this known to any of the Capris, especially Giacomo. His high sense of honour would prompt him to guard his prisoner more securely if he found that efforts were being made for his escape. Yet you may easily make use of Giacomo's unguarded descriptions of the prison and its duties to assist your object.

"And one word more before I conclude. Nina, beloved daughter! you know how my whole soul is bound up in you. My own sister's child is not so dear as you, whom I have watched from infancy, and have seen growing wiser, sweeter, fairer every day.

Heaven forgive me if in the press and hurry of mundane matters I have somewhat neglected your eternal interests.

“It is, I think, years since I imposed on you a penance. But this, though congenial to my own feelings, is not good for your soul’s welfare. The work which I give you to do will be, I know, difficult, harassing, painful, in every way most unpleasant, and distasteful to one of your temperament. It will require resolution and patience to carry it through. If, therefore, your conscience feels free from all but the minor failings of humanity, perform this as a good work which will stand you in stead hereafter; if, however, any secret unconfessed sin lie on your heart—who knows? We are all so foolish and frail, so weak in the hands of the tempter—I impose it as a penance. Undertake it, my daughter, patiently and submissively, with all the strength and determination of your nature; and whether you succeed in your efforts or not, but especially if you do, I absolve you from that sin, be it what it will. I do not for a moment suppose that you will refuse this mortification.

“My beloved child will never bring upon herself the awful curse of those who determinately disobey the mandates of the Church. And in this full belief I utterly bless you, my Nina. Go in peace! The peace which the Church only can bestow upon her faith-



ful and obedient children. So humbly and fervently prays your loving father,

“FRANCESCO.”

“P.S.—You will see that I have abandoned the use of my customary seal. I find that it has in some way become known to the French authorities, and I am fearful of letters being recognised and intercepted. The one I have substituted belongs to my sister’s husband, and being French will not excite surprise.

“I have noted down on a separate sheet of paper all the names and addresses of those concerned in, or likely to assist you in the task you have to perform.”

By the time Nina had finished reading this letter, her petulance had entirely subsided under the new interests which it awakened in her. Really gentle and compassionate as the Priest had called her, her whole soul melted into pity for the unfortunate young French girl and her ill-fated husband.

“I will do everything I can,” she murmured, while tears sprang to her eyes, “but I am so ignorant of these things—I know so little how to contrive—I must make a plan—how shall I begin—what shall I do first”—and she went back to the letter.

Besides compassion and obedience to the Priest two other motives of enormous magnitude prompted her to accept without mur-

mur or hesitation any work, however repugnant, difficult, or dangerous which this task might bring upon her.

Did not Father Francesco give her complete absolution for any sin, whatever it might be, if she could do this? No one knew better than herself the weight this lifted from her; the incomparable boon such absolution was to her. And last, though not least, was not this the very means by which to hear something of Claud? Perhaps to see him, meet him constantly. Her heart gave a great bound at the thought. She remembered the curious circumstance of the seal which had given her such delusive hopes. Here was the explanation. How very simple, but what a strange coincidence. This then must be the family that Claud had alluded to as connected with his own.

She began to wonder whether he was aware of the residence of this girl and her husband in Naples. She thought more and more deeply. Might not she herself contrive to make this a means of communication with him? Of course she might, nothing could be easier. And then, naturally, he would come constantly to see his kinswoman and help her in her trouble. Glad light flashed up into Nina's eyes. How very easy then to account for her acquaintance with him, the Padre would certainly look leniently on his own niece's near connection, and on the

friendship between him and herself, originating, as it would appear to do, in obedience to his express commands. It was all so feasible; it seemed already accomplished.

"Father Francesco shall have no reason to complain of my want of energy," she said, softly laying down the letter. "I will commence at once. Let me think. I must see who the people are, and where to find them."

Looking back among the scattered sheets the recollection of her broken promise to Madama Capri smote her with a chill.

"But I did not promise," she argued with herself; "I said nothing." She almost blushed to make use of such a mean subterfuge. "And besides," she hurriedly added, "it is all folly. I have opened the letter and read it; what harm has come to me?"

She went on moving the papers, smiling softly to herself, and murmuring —

"No, this does not look likely to bring anything of a curse with it."

At last she found what she wanted, a folded sheet, directed "Names and addresses."

She opened it. There was a short list, written with careful distinctness. First of all stood, "Name of Fleur-de-lys' husband, Claud de Meronne, Captain in a Lancer regiment and Aide-de-Camp to the General commanding, who is quartered in the Castellano Palace."

The letter dropped from Nina's hand. She stood as if turned to stone. Fire darting through her brain, black night before her eyes, dreadful despair in her heart !

So the curse had come upon her !

Stiff and colourless, but miserably conscious, not one of the agonies she suffered was blunted or softened in the least. This, then, was the mystery. He had deceived her from the beginning ; he had mocked her throughout ; he had seen her wretched delusion and triumphed in it. (She forgot that she herself had prevented him from ever saying a word containing anything more than sentimental flattery ; deceiving herself with the idea that by so doing she kept her vows unbroken.) He had never had for her even a passing fancy. He had been faithful to his French love all the time. Free from all bond or promise, he had claimed her at once on meeting again ; and she, wretched Nina, was thrown aside to live or die, or bear her misery as she would. And this was the end of the imperious, sinful course she had so long pursued. This was its pleasure and profit. And it was still unconfessed, unexpiated. She must pay the penalty without ever experiencing any gratification in return.

Slowly—slowly, gathered up in her mind a consciousness of the extent of her transgression. She knew that she had virtually broken her vows ; that she had deceived con-

stantly and unhesitatingly Father Francesco, both as guardian and confessor—and the latter was a deadly sin against the Church; she had incurred her father's righteous anger, for she had leagued herself with his bitter enemies. (Well she knew that had her acquaintance with Claud become known the proverbial deadly vengeance of the Castellani would only have been satisfied with the bravo's stiletto for him and a dark cell in a nunnery—perhaps even the chambers of the Inquisition—for her.) She had told more falsehoods than the sands of the sea; she had outraged the dignity of her family; she had betrayed her country; she had lowered herself beyond all parallel, giving away her whole heart and soul to one who had never asked for it, or cared to have it; she felt that her dessert was to be outcast and alien from every honest and Christian community. This was the result of her long course of deceit. It was over now, and the atonement must be made. And how was it to be made? She was to go through inconceivable trouble, hardship, anxiety, perhaps work repulsive and even dangerous, to free that man, the cause of her dreadful, dreadful despair and misery, to enable him to fly with the woman for whom she had been sacrificed—this Frenchwoman, probably a helpless doll, with no ability beyond curling her yellow hair and sitting before a mirror; for with a horrid

sting the words came back to her, "She is lovely as the heathen Venus."

Clenching her hands, and grinding her teeth, Nina started from her motionless posture. Her face was livid and contorted with passion; in her frenzy she clutched her long hair and tried to tear it out by the roots.

"I will not do it," she said, choking with rage; "I will *not* perform this penance—I will *not* make atonement. Let him die—let her die—I want no absolution—I will not have any—I will confess nothing—I will ask for nothing—I will do nothing—I want nothing—I care for nothing—I will live without repentance—I will die without hope"—

She stopped in her furious tirade with a gasp of terror. What was that face, white, livid, fiendish, horrible, but strangely like her own, that seemed to look at her for a moment from the wall and disappear?

The shock calmed her. She shuddered dreadfully for a few minutes. She thought of the legend, and the appearance of her wicked ancestress, and the well-known likeness between all the daughters of her family. But she saw nothing more, and muttering "It was only fancy" walked to the toilet table and looked in the glass. The same face a little modified met her there.

"I suppose I saw myself in one of the mirrors." She went on, "I look like a fiend:

no wonder ; I feel like one. Well done, my wicked ancestress. You have kept your word this night. I congratulate you ! ”

She paced back again across the room. At the further end in a niche stood a little image of the Virgin. Nina had been accustomed always to bend her head when she stood before this image, which was seldom, for it was not in a part of the room which she habitually used ; and in the morning and at night she invariably knelt the first and last thing, and said “ Ave Maria ! ” but now she stood obstinately still.

Something in the wild chaos of her mind brought back the night in the prison ; her despair ; her wild supplication ; her promise if released from death to confess and atone ; and the absolute and most perfect fulfilment of what she craved. Had she confessed ? Had she atoned ? She stamped furiously on the ground, and turned away without a reverence.

Till this moment she had never dreamed of any good Catholic being guilty of such an indignity. It was tantamount to denying her creed. She knew it ; but the demons that possessed her would not let her yield.

“ I am cursed already,” she said sullenly, “ it does not matter what I do.”

Alas ! was the legend so true ?

She leaned out of the window again. The moon was entirely gone, leaving a little dim

light in the sky ; the shadows were gone too, but the trees themselves were swinging their branches about in a weird dance, and the wind alternately whispering and shrieking among them like a tempting and avenging demon.

"The fiends are abroad to-night," said Nina, with horrible calmness, "and I have sold myself to them. Sold?" — with a scornful laugh, "given—for I certainly have got nothing in return. No, nothing—nothing. Good-bye, hope and happiness ; good-bye peace in life and rest after death. Good-bye all holy things ; come to me all that is unholy and powerful, come to me and help me, for revenge I will have, I will not suffer alone !"

The wind seemed to scream a chorus to her words, and the church clock struck midnight.

And then commenced one of those frightful convulsions through which living souls sometimes pass, when good and evil are fighting for the mastery. The fight which is going on for ever throughout the universe. The fight which commenced in Heaven before time was, and will only end in Heaven when time shall be no more !

"Michael and his angels fought with the dragon and his angels."

And the battle raged fiercely now in Nina's rebellious heart. Wild and terrible plans of vengeance ; furious casting away of all law and restraint ; impious charges of injustice



against the eternal decrees, chased through her mind and found vent at her lips.

Truly the fiends she had invoked gathered round her in strength. Giants in size and might, and armed with weapons which she herself had put into their hands.

But yet they were not all powerful. There was a small opposing influence. Pale and slender indeed, but steady and unflinching, such as we might fancy a single white-robed angel turning its bright face against a horde of the blackened rebel spirits.

In every shameful plan the wretched Nina meditated, in every guilty abandonment of truth and justice, in every imprecation against the majesty of Heaven, there was a flaw. Her native nobleness rebelled against them all. The fiends whispered and tempted, she listened and answered, and raved in fierce triumph—but did not consent.

The time went on. The clock struck the quarters regularly. The morning hours were advancing. The battle still raged. She walked to and fro. She stood at the window. She opened drawers and shut them. She lifted things from the table and put them down again. While so employed her fingers unconsciously closed over a small bottle which had fallen from a hastily shut drawer. She looked at it vaguely for a few seconds without recognition; then, a great start, a wonderful trouble in her face, a dark red flush up to the

roots of her hair, and down almost to her finger-tips—a guilty, cowering, shamed look gradually stealing over her.

It was the little bottle containing the elixir which she had taken from Claud in the vaults. She looked at it earnestly. Of what did it not remind her? A spasm of remorse contracted her features. In what different colours did the sight of that little bottle paint Claud's character and conduct. Its tiny size cut her to the heart. She could hear Claud's hollow voice, she could see his sunken eyes and drawn features as he gasped out, "Use it sparingly—there is only enough for you." For her! He never thought of himself.

Once on that track her thoughts flew rapidly. The efforts he had made, the risks he had run, his calm, brave preparation for death in the loathsome vault, the strain on every nerve to save *her*, the weight on his spirits, his abortive efforts to speak it out, the suspicions to which he must have exposed himself, his present condemnation even dated perhaps from that night, and all this without the motive, she now saw, of gratifying his own fancy. She remembered what he had said to her. "I have brought you to this pass, I will share whatever befalls you." And he had done it. He had risked life and reputation, and all his future of hope and happiness; he had left his betrothed wife who was "lovely as the heathen Venus"

(that expression did not gall her so much as it had done before), carrying in addition to his own troubles the weight of *her* grief and desolation. He did not fail in this effort ; and had never once hesitated or faltered.

And she was planning to leave this man unaided to suffer the very death from which he had saved her.

Could the man who would act in this way deceive her willingly, triumph in her delusion, hold her up to derision ? Impossible ! Had not all the error, all the misfortune, been of her own doing, far more than his ?

Her thoughts began to travel back with gigantic strides over all the events of that night. How, having done for her more than it seemed possible for human power to achieve, he had given her over to the zealous care of his best friend, whose thoughtful kindness had filled her eyes with hysterical tears. She thought of Chevelure's one request, "If you can help a Frenchman, for our sakes do it," and the solemn answer she had made to him. Then back further still to Claud's parting words, "I have much to tell you;" back still to their first curious meeting ; her proud, rude language to him, his generous assistance in return ; and after that, how many days *she* had wandered about seeking *him* before he came. If the actions of both were sifted, the hearts of both laid open, which would best bear the scrutiny, his or her own ?

Nina's torment grew worse than before. Dreadful conscience stinging her on one side, and her proud, rebellious heart clamouring for revenge on the other. She covered her face with her hands, and tried to shut out memory itself. In vain! She could forget nothing. And everything she remembered was to his credit and honour. What evil had he done to her, compared with what she contemplated doing to him? Was this the way she kept her promise to Chevelure? Her revenge gradually shrank and dwindled from its magnificent proportions, till it became only a cruel, jealous spite; yet still, mad and desperate, she would not give in. She hated herself for the thought of submitting tamely to her humiliating lot, but she would hate herself more for changing it by the means that she would use.

The demons that she could not lay gathered round her afresh, and whispered that she had been deceived, and scorned, and humbled; but their voices had a false ring; she shuddered at their whispers, and turned now and then with sad, longing eyes to the one angel who stood, visible still, but very far off, little more than a bright shadow; and every time she did so the angel drew a step nearer.

Rocking to and fro in her chair, a silent moan going up from her all the time, she found herself unconsciously contemplating in a kind of agony of pity the forlorn, heart-

broken condition of Claud's young wife, and thinking if Claud died this shameful death who would protect and comfort her; what could she do, helpless and friendless, among foreigners and strangers, spies and enemies? She went on picturing to herself the crushing misery that would fall upon her when the dreadful deed was accomplished.

"Ah, poverina! What will she do?" sobbed Nina, and tears which she had not shed before that night came fast from her eyes in strange sympathy for the desolation of her rival. Then she started to her feet in a burst of indignation against those who could do to death a man so noble, so innocent.

"They shall not do it," she exclaimed, "I—I myself will save him."

"For her?" suggested a horrid voice.

Nina struggled desperately with the base thought.

"Yes," she panted, shaking as in an ague fit, "I *will* save him—for her. To save me he risked himself and her too."

She turned fiercely round as if confronting an antagonist.

"Did I not swear in my heart to give my life *to* him or *for* him? He has not asked it, but I will give it—a free gift. Ah! willingly," she moaned; "it is not much to give. All truth and goodness went out of me long ago. What is left but a withered

existence, a blackened conscience, a perjured soul? Oh, misery! My punishment is greater than I can bear, and I have brought it all upon myself."

She drooped her head in her hands. Her anguish was so great, that she was ready to welcome any means of lessening it.

"Save him," said a busy fiend, "save him for yourself. He is so noble, that he must be grateful. He will forget this French girl. Perhaps he was hurried into the marriage. Possibly he was arrested before the ceremony, and his real preference may be for you. Would he have done so much for one to whom he was indifferent?"

Nina listened, but her instinctive truthfulness made her reject the falsehood, though so deliciously sweet. Her native uprightness recoiled from putting upon another the punishment due to herself.

"I think the fiends must, indeed, be about me," she said, looking round her with haggard eyes, "for my very thoughts are vile. Doubtless the holy saints have abandoned me, and therefore do I dream such dreams. 'Save him for myself?' And if I *could*, that wretched girl must then suffer what I suffer now; and *she* has done nothing," she added gloomily.

"No, no," she continued, pacing hurriedly up and down, "if Claud *could* do that, could forsake her now, I would abandon him," she

burst out; "scorn him, never look at him again, even if they are *not* married; it is the same thing. But, no," she stopped short, "Claud would never do that. I know him too well now. I can see why he never told me. He guessed my folly, he tried to leave me alone. I followed him, I brought him into trouble, and he would not reproach me, his kindness made him weak. And she" —

A long pause. A great strife in her mind. But she combated the bad passion bravely, and beat it down. Her features softened. She folded her hands gently together.

"He loves her," she said. "She must be good and noble. I will save her from this misery."

Baffled again, the tormenting fiends shrank back, and the angel, who was now quite close, stooped and laid his shining hand upon Nina's head. And then all at once her wretched madness gave way. She sat down beside the table, and leaning her head in her hands, wept floods of those burning tears which rarely fall more than once in a lifetime; tears that would have been despair, but just tempered by resignation.

She rose at last, crossed the room, and flung herself before the Madonna.

"Oh, Mother of Mercy, pardon me, for I was blind, and could not see. I was mad, and could not comprehend the righteous judgment. Help me now, Holy Mother, and

I swear to fulfil it all, the whole penance, and when all is done, give me peace ! ”

She clasped the marble feet, looking up imploringly, and it seemed to her that the mild eyes moved, the gentle lips smiled, and the glory round the head undulated as if the head itself were bending forward.

Nina stood up, and clasping the pedestal, leaned her white face against it, and her cheek was the most colourless of the two.

“ I accept the penance,” she said humbly, “ I will make the atonement. Perhaps I have not sinned beyond pardon. I will tell Father Francesco the whole, from beginning to end. I think he will absolve me. This that I do will partly expiate—not all, no ; for I have transgressed fearfully since he wrote that promise.” (And the bare walls of a nun’s cell rose distinctly before her eyes.) “ No matter, it will not last long. Oh, Madonna, I have suffered ! Not hours only ; centuries of heart-ache have gone over me this night ! ”

What was it that whispered in her ear —

“ Is not such agony enough to expiate any crime ? ”

She did not assent to the tempter, but she let him go on.

“ Suppose there should be some mistake, *possibly* another Claud, then why confess and sacrifice everything ? Folly, madness ! ”

It was only a moment that she hesitated ;



every high instinct in her revolted from such vacillating treachery. And she was sick at heart, and weary of struggling.

"I will do it, whatever it cost," she said, answering her own thoughts, "even to the loss of life and happiness. I am weary of concealment and deceit; I loathe the life that I have lived; I shudder at the sins it has brought upon me. I cannot go back to innocence; I will go on to repentance; and when all is done, the peace that I have lost may come back to me—somewhere—no matter where.

"No," she added musingly, "I feel that there is no mistake. It is Claud himself, my Claud, and he is married. That I know is sure. And I will save him, and send him safe away. I would have given my life for him before; how much more, seeing that it is the only thing I have to give, and what a far nobler one he gave for me!"

She had beaten down her enemies once more, but the victory was not yet won. All the powers of hell gathered themselves up for one decisive blow. Suddenly she started, and stood fixed as a statue. A recollection that flashed into her mind sent the blood surging up over her pale cheeks and down to her very finger-tips with an electric shock.

This recollection said to her, "Pause, consider, suppose the possibility of some mistake; Claud's well-being, perhaps his

life, is as much endangered by any confession as it was before. Remember the deadly vengeance of the Castellani. It does not pause for reason or pity. An affront to wash away, a secret to hide—so, the spy, the decoy, the assassin's dagger, easily done, soon over, and a wretched woman imprisoned in a nun's cell. How can she aid him? Is this a fit return for all he has dared and done? Pause, think, and if it *should* be another Claud, say nothing, tell nothing, and yours is still your own."

Surely the arch-fiend himself must have devised a temptation so subtle as this.

Tossed to and fro by the tempest of her own thoughts Nina could only groan with anguish, muttering as she paced up and down the room—

"Could they do it—would they? Oh, no. I will take all the blame and all the punishment. For me cloister and veil, and farewell to life and daylight without a murmur."

"What?" said the mocking spirits, "with Claud living and faithful, and waiting and watching for you day by day? And, perhaps, French and Italians mingling and marrying together on all sides, and by a few hasty words you destroy his happiness and your own."

And then she saw before her Claud's sunny face and eloquent eyes; all his noble qualities crowded into her, his chivalrous devotion,

his calm self-sacrifice, and a future with him — Fairyland! And on the other hand, the veil, with its cold black folds, the bare convent walls, the stagnant life, the burning, wasting memories of what might have been, the longing for freedom, the impotent battling with a sealed fate, all this she knew would be her portion; and the will, so thoroughly subjected a little while before, wandered back and began to reassert itself, and Nina, tortured and maddened, was again wavering.

And the fiends pointed, and grinned, and danced in joy at their anticipated triumph; and the angel stood motionless, and the sublime calm of his countenance deepened into awful expectation; for this was the supreme moment, and the soul which the angel guarded must make its own decisive choice.

And out of the tumult of Nina's mind the only thought that could disentangle itself was —

“Must I do it? must I? It is so hard,” she added, and the tears slowly welled into her eyes and stood there. “Oh, Madonna! help me now!”

She was really wishing and trying to do this hard thing, but she was sorely beset; mind and body were both so weakened that she could scarcely tell right from wrong, and she was terribly tempted.

"Shall I wait a little till I know more?"

The angel's face was dark, and his voice stern as he said —

"Is that penance? Is that atonement? Is that a vow fulfilled?"

Once more the unerring principle of truth in Nina's nature set her on the right track, and the evil influence waned.

"I have sworn to do it," she said, "at all costs; it would be worse than perjury to go back now. I will keep this vow intact. And I will pray for him, and Madonna will help him, and the holy saints will guard him from harm. If I break it, what crime, what misery will not come? Good cannot rise out of evil—to do right cannot cause wrong."

She paused for a little while in deep thought. All her life passed in review before her. Never before had it seemed so faulty, so base, so stained. At last she looked up, calm and resolute.

"I have decided," she said, "nothing shall move me again. No temptation of earth or hell shall entice me!"

The doubt and the misery melted from her face. A great light broke over it. The angel had touched her with his shining wings, and bending down his head the star that burned upon his forehead threw a radiance round her like a glory. She felt an inexpressible comfort as of some mighty strength supporting her.

“Hear me from Heaven, Blessed Mary,” she said, solemnly raising her hand, “hear me from the Holy of Holies. For what I have sinned I bitterly repent, for the wickedness that I have committed I will atone. I shall suffer, but I will not fail. Hear me, Madonna of the Bleeding Heart, and give me strength to keep the vow!”

She kissed the silver crucifix that hung round her neck, and as she did so through the dark, chilly air came a tinkling sound, clear and distinct in the silence—one—two—three. Again one—two—three. Another pause, and then the bells of all the churches far and near rang out their summons to the first prayers of the morning—a full and joyful peal, for the day dedicated to the All Holy had dawned, and that night of fiery temptation and trial was at last over.

Nina had conquered. Utterly beaten and discomfited, the baffled fiends gathered up their broken and useless weapons, and fled away into the darkness from which they came. But the angel stood beside Nina, and spread out his mighty wings and sheltered her; and the shadow had gone from his face for ever, and it was glorious as the noonday, and he spoke to her in a language which no mortal ear could hear, nor any evil heart comprehend. But even while the heavenly influence soothed her, a sharp spasm of physical pain contracted her fea-

tures, a wild convulsive agony cramping up her limbs, running like burning swords through her quivering muscles, clutching and tearing at her heart. It only lasted a few seconds, departing suddenly as it came. It was not much to be wondered at. When nerve and brain are worked too hard they will turn in anger and rend the body.

It left her sick and exhausted, but still wrapped in the wonderful calm that had fallen upon her from the moment that she made her final decision. She felt vaguely that a terrible ordeal was over, that she had gained a victory, that the fiends who had so long held her in thrall were gone, never to return. The continual doubt and fear, the gnawing suspicion, the dread of discovery, the ceaseless self-accusations, the wearing present, the threatening future, all rendered more unbearable by the presence of her one truthful monitor, the native uprightness of her disposition, she had banished them for ever by her determination to do right, independent of reward and careless of the consequences.

Her overweening pride and tendency to deceit—the latter inherent in every Italian heart, however noble otherwise—had both received such a crushing blow as deprived them altogether of vitality. These were her worst foes. So many emotions had gone to

make up her decision that she could not herself have told which was the most influential.

A shrinking dislike (even in her wildest mood) to do harm to Claud, who, in truth, had no way fallen from the height upon which she had placed him. Also bitter shame for the return she had meditated for all the unparalleled kindness of himself and his friends; also the thought of Chevelure's brown eyes, which seemed to have the power of piercing hearts, picking out the mean or false element, and holding it up to scorn and loathing. How would they look at *her*? Also a superstitious dread of so many broken promises; also the weariness of her heart, which had found no rest in the forbidden path she had been pursuing. And through, and above, and influencing and deciding the bent of all these, her natural rectitude, her strong sense of justice, her inveterate loathing of falsehood and meanness. Through this she had conquered. The wrath of the dead ancestress had been thwarted, and surely the curse had failed.

She knew that she had that night obeyed a higher voice than she had ever before listened to; that toiling and painfully she had struggled towards a light, clearer and more steadfast than had yet guided her, un-

conscious that the light came direct from Heaven, and the voice was the voice of an angel!.

She had been faithful to the best of her power, and through all her pain, and weakness, and misery, she could feel, not hear the consoling words "Well done!"

Wearied out, mind and body, on this for the moment she rested. For that day, at least, the evil had indeed been sufficient, and she left the morrow to take thought for itself.

She knew that the penance was only begun—the atonement had yet to be made; and though the very thought was a terror she dreamed no more of shrinking from it, she only said, "How shall I accomplish it?" She felt very penitent, and humble, and heart-broken. But could her mortal eyes have pierced the veil which divides Time from Eternity, she would have seen an angel standing beside her with outstretched, protecting wings, with the glory of Heaven on his face and a palm-branch in his hand.



### CHAPTER III.

GREAT was Madama Capri's dismay when, on the morning following this eventful night, her beautiful guest appeared at the first meal with a face whose paleness, though ghastly, was the least remarkable change which seemed to have passed over it since the evening. An indefinable, incomprehensible expression had taken possession of it. If another soul had entered Nina's body, the total alteration of every familiar look and gesture could not have been more complete. It was not grief or pain, still less anger or sullenness that sat on the unnaturally silent lips, and looked out of the sad, mysterious eyes. Sadness, indeed, was the latent expression of the whole countenance, but other and more active feelings were working there, though chained and silenced by a resolute determination that, if dimly seen, their nature should remain unknown. Madama heard her guest's foot on the stairs, and marvelled that it came so slow, and fell so softly, for Nina's usual advent into the morning room was by a succession of light bounds down the staircase and along the corridor, certainly more emphatic than walking, yet not quite so undignified as running, the sort of pace which

we might imagine a youthful queen would use, for we cannot picture royalty racing, when in full health and boundless spirits.

Madama looked up anxiously as she entered, half expecting some small disaster such as a sleepless night, or a sprained ankle, but the sight she saw drove these trivial fancies from her mind.

"Holy saints!" she screamed, "my darling, my beauty, what is it? Are you ill, my treasure?" running and clasping her in her arms. "You are pale as the fainting Madonna yonder, and such cold hands," pressing them between her own. "Ah! I feared it, the damp last night, and your thin dress, love; this season is treacherous. You must go to bed again, carina. I will bring you a specific of my own; infallible in all cases of cold or malaria; and I will make a decoction of those dried leaves they call tea. You will drink it, darling, it is not so very distasteful, and a fine medicine. Come, cara, come back to your chamber, love" —

But Nina quietly resisted the efforts of the old lady to lead her away, kissed her gently and respectfully, but without warmth, and answered —

"I am not ill, dear signora, I have no malady whatever; but I have not slept this night, and I am troubled in mind. I have a hard task to accomplish. Father Francesco's letter gives me a penance to perform."

"You did not open it last night, child?" exclaimed madama in sudden terror.

"I did," she replied, as if those two syllables were an utter weariness to pronounce.

"You did? Oh, Nina! oh, my beautiful! And the curse?"

"Has found me," answered Nina quickly, but cold and grave as a statue.

Madama retreated a few steps, grief and amazement struggling in her face, and choking her words.

Nina walked to an open window, and seating herself, leaned her head on her hand and looked blankly out over the garden. Madama, recovering after a few seconds, came and bent fondly and beseechingly over her young charge.

"Do not think I am presuming, darling," she murmured, "but may I not know what it is? *How* has the curse found you, dear one? What has the Padre's letter to do with it? Why has he given you a penance? And can no one help to bear the burden? And what, oh, my foolish child, enticed you to that fatal act? Will you not tell me, cara?"

Nina looked round with the same gravely patient face, and those unutterably sad eyes which seemed to send a chill to madama's heart; and gently caressing the old lady, but with the same absent, weary manner, she

told of her unbridled curiosity and proud defiance of the legend; also her shameful evasion of the implied, if not actually given, promise not to open the letter till morning. She told it in as few words as might be, omitting nothing except her own secret causes of grief, and never justifying herself in any way; for while she spoke she knew well that it was not the impotent curse of a dead woman, but her own active wickedness which had brought this retribution upon her. Madama listened eagerly. When Nina had finished her countenance became more placid.

"Ah, dear child, you were wrong, very foolish and wrong; but I was partly to blame too; I should not have tempted you with that letter, young things are weak. But the penance Father Francesco gives cannot be for that. Let us know now what is the penance that can turn those rose-coloured cheeks into lilies, and make thy bright eyes heavy as with poppy juice. Speak, deary, tell me."

"I cannot," said Nina, "I am bound to secrecy. It is a tale of injustice, and cruelty, and misery, and I must right it all. Ah, me! Madonna of the Bleeding Heart help me!"

Sorely distressed was the goldsmith's wife at finding herself condemned to remain in ignorance; thus preventing all advice, help,

and consolation. But Nina's manner was so strangely altered, her mind so evidently made up to the performance of this duty, which madama could see was not only distasteful but abhorrent to her, that the good lady's distress and compassion, though abundant both of them, were almost swallowed up in overwhelming curiosity. In the first place, what duty likely to be assigned to her young charge, *could* cause the effect she witnessed? Did Father Francesco know the distress it gave her? What penance could he possibly inflict of such damaging weight on both mind and body? Mind indeed chiefly, for she had had no time for bodily hardship.

After cogitating some time within herself, madama came to the very natural and sensible conclusion, that nothing short of condemning the proud daughter of the Castellani to marry a Frenchman serving in the Imperial army, could cause the utter dejection and desolation she witnessed. But then again she knew well that Father Francesco would sooner take that fair head, and chop it ruthlessly from the ivory neck, than permit, much less command, so utterly degrading a sacrifice. Besides, what end would such an extraordinary unnatural project serve? The holy saints would reject such a guilty offering; and, moreover, what could the innocent child have done to entail such a punishment?

No, no, that was out of the question. What then could it be? And why did she deserve a penance at all? Surely the poor thing's little failings might be fairly condoned by the trouble and distress she had already undergone.

Terrified, and threatened, and hunted from the wretched shelter of a fisherman's hut, what was the peccadillo for which this would not be considered sufficient punishment?

Madama Capri, like all Italian women of her age and class, had an enormous reverence for the priesthood. She bowed herself submissively before a three-cornered hat, however coarse and common might be the mind which lived beneath it; no wonder then that for one like Father Francesco her respect was little short of awe. His great learning, austere life, and untiring energy, filled her with astonishment and admiration.

"The Padre must be more than man," she frequently said; "he eats nothing, he sleeps one hour in the twenty-four; he knows everything that everybody does, even those that are hundreds of miles away, and has read every book that ever was written."

Had the imposer of Nina's penance been an every-day priest, such as she met by shoals walking in the streets, she might have ventured to suggest, with much humility and deprecation, that possibly he

had mistaken his penitent's case, but with Father Francesco that was impossible.

"Father Francesco mistake? Father Francesco unjust? Sooner say that the blue sky was a mistake; that the sun shone to hurt, not heal the earth."

And so the poor lady was tossed backwards and forwards between her firm belief that Nina required no penance whatever, and her unassailable faith in Father Francesco's infallibility.

Moreover, had it been something small, though disagreeable, such as midnight prayers, or a strict fast, or wearing black for a month, she could have understood that the Padre thought it necessary to keep his young pupil in mind of such mortifications; but a penance that was evidently breaking the child's heart? She could only come back to the first questions, what could it be, and why inflict it?

Then soothing and caressing she began to try and extract from Nina the nature, or at any rate the means, to be taken for the accomplishing of this terrible penance.

She learnt this much.

"That Nina must go out every day, and perhaps even at night; never telling where she went. That she must be disguised. That Margherita must attend her," madama gave a gasp of relief, "but that she too

must remain ignorant of the matter in hand. That she should require large sums of money"—madama's face was a picture—"which Maestro Capri would furnish her with." Madama decided that her fair guest was touched in the head. "That she must begin at once; that very day, that very hour."

"Poverina!" ejaculated madama, "would that the Duke's physician were at hand; but we will call another."

"That she must see Maestro Capri as soon as possible"—

"Yes, darling, yes," said the old lady, in the tone which we use to a delirious patient.

Finally Nina produced the note from Father Francesco to the goldsmith, and begged that he might have it without delay. Madama was rather staggered at this. It looked like business. But suddenly remembering that the note might in some degree elucidate matters, and gratify her own burning curiosity, she started up and offered to transport it then and there to her husband, who was busy in his sanctum overlooking accounts. Nina entreated her to do so, and the old lady set off at a brisker trot than she had used for some years past. But her thirst for knowledge was not destined to be slaked just yet, for the goldsmith, deep in calculations, merely pointed to a clear corner of the littered



table, and bade her leave her missive there, and he would attend to it presently. She tried to explain and rouse his curiosity, but she might as well have attempted to entice the dragon from the garden of Hesperides, with a cup of milk and water, as induce the wealthy craftsman to forego his vigilant watch over the golden fruits of his skill with a tale of pale cheeks and heavy eyes. So madama was forced to retreat unsatisfied, and returned to Nina, not without a sudden apprehension as to what might have happened in her absence; for with such an evident horror hanging over her, there was no guessing what the poor thing might do. But she found Nina in the same listless attitude, gazing with that wonderful far-away look over the green cheery garden, which with the bright sunlight and cool air looked much more like early spring than the month of fogs and suicide, as the melancholy dwellers in some northern islands are wont to term it.

“The Padrone will attend to the reverend Father’s letter at once, my dear one; meantime, look not thou so sad. This trouble cannot be of the magnitude that it seemeth to thee; the honoured Father would never give a severe penance to one whom he holds so dear. Thou hast mistaken his meaning, child; or he has written hastily or illegibly; the Padrone’s note will doubtless explain.

Cheer thee, my dove; it will turn out to be nothing, trust me for it."

Thus madama, hoping to wile from the strangely preoccupied Nina some admission or explanation; but all in vain, a grave questioning look, and a half-stifled sigh were her only answer.

The servants coming in with materials for breakfast, gave madama's thoughts another opening.

"Come, child, come and eat; fasting is bad for the head, and worse for the heart; life is but a sorrowful matter to the hungry. 'Tis a great festa, child; we honour the holy saints by eating well this day. Come, we will not wait the Padrone, he is busy just now. Nay, then, my child"—for Nina, deep in her own thoughts, took no notice of this invitation—"what wilt thou do? Without eating, who can live? If we eat not, beauty vanishes and strength decays, and sickness comes, and then we die. And a penance, be it what it will, is but a little thing set against health and length of days. That's well, my deary; now we shall do;" for Nina had turned round with a start, and saying as if to herself—"Of course I must eat; yes, I forgot," came and seated herself beside her hostess, who placed hot coffee and rich cream before her, and gathered into her vicinity every dish upon the table.

"The sardines are fresh," she urged, "try

them, love ; and the mullet were swimming in the bay two hours ago. These muscatelles are the finest in Naples, they ripened on the south trellis of old Giovanni's garden. An honest man old Giovanni, and liberal, too. He sent me a basket of these same grapes when Giacomo was born. And a wonderful gardener he is ; he knows a good fruit without looking at it. He has supplied us for years. Come, child, let me see you eat ; it breaks my old heart to look at those pale cheeks ; there, they are better already."

And certainly as Nina drank the warm, stimulating coffee, she felt wonderfully refreshed and invigorated.

However heavy mental trouble may be, it is always aggravated by cold and exhaustion, and Nina's night of sleepless misery and the clinging chilliness which always accompanies long hours of watching, had truly something to do with her wretched looks this morning. Something, but only a small part ; they simply acted as a magnifier, and brought out details, which otherwise would not have appeared on the surface.

The body has a great effect on the mind, and feeling for the moment a little cheered, she tried to resume her usual manner, and putting her arms round madama's neck as the old lady stooped over her, she kissed her fondly, and declared herself better.

"Of course, deary, I knew it. Nothing

like a cup of coffee for trouble, I say." Adding triumphantly to herself—"Just as I thought, chilled with the dew, too cold to sleep, fever in the morning, and that unlucky letter.

"She'll have an illness, I doubt not," continued the old lady, musing; "and perhaps bad news from the Duke, for that curse has never failed yet, though who knows but it might pass away now, seeing how strangely a blessing was pronounced at last."

And then remembering for the first time—she had been too much engrossed to think of it before—that her son had not made his appearance, she exclaimed —

"And where, I marvel, is Giacomo; it is the first morning he has failed us for a long time. You have not seen him, carina?"

• "No, indeed," replied Nina, starting and flushing nervously, as she remembered how necessary would be Giacomo's help to her already outlined plan; and noting with apprehension his unusual absence. But the start and the flush did not escape Madama Capri, and she performed a series of complacent mental nods over her own discernment, and the sagacious way in which she had conducted matters, now so unmistakably moving in the right direction. With unbounded delight, too, she saw Nina's eyes wander to the window, and fix on the shrubbery dividing the wilderness from the garden,

as if looking for someone in that direction, turning her head, too, at every sound, and seeming preoccupied, and anxious.

Madama was the most discreet of mothers, chaperones, and match-makers; yet she could hardly prevent herself from exclaiming —

“Fear not, my beauty. ’Twould be as easy to prevent the tide from flowing, as Giacomo from coming to thee.”

Maestro Capri now appeared, and greeted Nina with unusual gravity and tenderness. He took his coffee silently, forgot to put in cream and sugar, pushed away his plate before he had finished, resumed it without remark, ate grapes and sardines together, tried to talk and failed. Maestro Capri was evidently moved in an unwonted degree. His wife, too, was astonished to see him cast stealthy glances of the deepest compassion at Nina, for though she had tried to tell him of her indisposition, he had never listened or understood one word; and she had recovered so much now, that her appearance alone would never have excited those sidelong looks of mournfulness and sympathy. And with all this he asked no question.

At last he said as curtly as he could well express it —

“I have read the reverend Father’s letter, signorina; I am ready to do all that he desires. Apply to me for whatever you

want. To begin with, you had better take this."

And to madama's unutterable amazement, a large bag of dollars, was produced from some of his ample pockets, and laid before Nina.

She thanked him much as she would had he helped her to a slice of melon; and madama began to see that there was more reason in her guest's supposed delirium than she had at all counted on. She longed to speak to her husband, but refrained till Nina had left the room, which she did almost immediately, and then questions came like a torrent from the old lady's lips. But she was fated to disappointment on all sides; she could get no more from him than she had from Nina. That he was himself ignorant of the precise nature of Nina's penance he soon convinced her; but she saw plainly that there was something behind which he did not tell; something which caused those compassionate glances, and his own changed manner. He admitted that Father Francesco had informed him that he had given the young Duchessa a hard work to perform, and had directed him to furnish her with money and all things that she should require; but of the nature of the work he had no more idea than the cup which stood before him. To all his wife's enquiries he only said, "I have nothing more to tell."

But he impressed upon madama with almost stern gravity that she must in no way interfere with Nina's proceedings or try to check her in going out, or doing what she would; still more that she must not worry her with enquiries, or solicitude, beyond what was necessary for her health and well-being. The Padre had especially enjoined this; serious matters might be concerned in it.

"And what will the child do with all that money?" asked madama, fairly awed into submission; for she now began to fear that Nina's face of woe might not be without reason.

"*That* she knows best herself," replied the goldsmith; "she has a right to it, for it belongs to the Duke" —

He paused abruptly, rose from his chair, went to the window, and looked silently out.

"Giacomo not here?" he said at last turning round.

"No," replied madama, volubly, "this is a morning of marvels. He has not been absent at this hour for more weeks than I can remember. What can have kept him?"

"Duty," returned the goldsmith, with unaccustomed brevity. After a short silence he resumed, "I am not surprised at his absence, but I wish, I wish most truly, that he were here." He began to walk up and down the room with his hands behind him, always with him a sign of deep thought. He

stopped at last abruptly before his wife. "I have more than half a mind," he said, "to go down to the prison and seek Giacomo. He is sure to be there; I *must* speak to him."

Had the goldsmith announced his intention of going up in a balloon, his wife's astonishment would not have been half so great. He had never expressed any disapproval of Giacomo retaining his post under the French government; had in fact agreed with him that it was better to do so; but it was observable that from the very hour of Joseph being proclaimed King of Naples, he never once turned his steps in the direction of Strada Prigione, the scene of Giacomo's duties. He tacitly ignored the fact of his son being employed by the usurping government, though ready enough to profit by the exemption from suspicion which accrued to him therefrom. To proclaim, therefore, now that he was going to seek his son in the very stronghold of usurpation, would have made clear to a much duller comprehension than that of Madama Capri, that some very unusual and disturbing influence had set in upon her husband's mind. She despaired of getting any enlightenment from him, but hoped to be more successful with Giacomo, and discreetly refrained therefore from remarking further on this most inconsistent proceeding.



"Do so, amico," she replied. "Giacomo has the head of a lawyer for business, and the skill of a priest in finding out secrets. His counsel is well worth the having. And I meantime will go and see after matters indoors."

And the signora rose hastily, for she heard Margherita's step descending the stairs, and guessed that she had been closeted with Nina, and possibly knew somewhat of all these mysterious matters. The goldsmith looked after her as she went out and for a moment seemed half inclined to call her back, but checked himself, and muttering, "No, better not; she will talk," resumed his thoughtful pacing up and down the room.

Madama found Margherita not a whit wiser than herself, indeed not so wise; for Nina had only told her that she had received instructions from Father Francesco to fulfil various duties left unfinished by himself; that this would oblige her to be frequently in the city at all hours, and that she must accompany her as guide and companion. This was all strange and unusual enough, but the faithful old nurse was so pained at her darling's altered looks, that all other emotions were deadened, for the moment at least, by dismay.

It certainly gave her little comfort to be illuminated to the utmost of the Signora Capri's light.

"A penance?" she exclaimed scornfully, and with very little of madama's reverence, "has the father left his head behind him? A penance to that child whose worst fault has been straying too far to look after the wild flowers. A penance indeed! The little coaxing beauty, he never gave her a penance in her life, and never would. Don't tell me of penances! I don't know what it all is, but trust me for finding out. The child may be ill, or moonstruck, or got the evil eye for all I can tell; but don't persuade me that Father Franceso, the wisest and best man in Naples, has been guilty of a folly like that. Why if he fancied her not so light of foot as usual his voice would be as sharp as a saw questioning me as to what was the matter. A penance indeed! Not from Father Franceso, I'll answer for it."

And Margherita, all unconscious of the truth she had uttered, bustled about angrily while she donned her holiday attire preparatory to accompanying her young mistress abroad.

"Well, that is what she tells me," sighed madama, "but truly I am perplexed. And, Margherita, mind to take great care of her, and don't let her get tired, and bring her back for dinner; and, Margherita, mark where she goes, and try to find out something, and oh! for your very soul, don't let her come to harm."

"Depend upon me, madama," said Margherita, strong in all the dignity of nursehood. "I carried her in my arms when she was the size of a kitten, and I think," stretching out those bony members, "though there's not much strength left in them now, if the little jewel was in danger I'd contrive to bear her safe out of it, though I fell down and died next minute."

But now Nina's soft, clear voice was heard calling her nurse, and mistress and maid stepped out on to the landing where she stood, and both, as they caught sight of her uttered an exclamation of surprise. Nina had dispensed with her nurse's services in dressing in order to hurry the old woman, who was not very quick in her movements, and she was not aware that her young mistress intended to assume any costume different to what she usually wore when going into the city with madama. She was astonished therefore at the figure before her.

Nina was dressed entirely in black. It was a rich dress of shining silk which had been made in the Spanish style to gratify a caprice of madama, who, never tired of inventing new embellishments for her beautiful charge, had declared that a Spanish style of trimming would set off that incomparable figure to the best advantage. It was simple and quiet enough, for though neither high in the throat nor down to the wrists, the portion

of her neck and arms left uncovered was so draped and shrouded in rich black lace that the marble skin shining through seemed only a slight relief to the sable hue of the whole costume. And over all she had assumed a mantilla of lace so heavy that when drawn upon the face not a feature would be discernable. The only ornament about her was a pair of handsome pearl bodkins indispensable for fastening the mantilla, indeed had she possessed any plainer she would have used them, and the little silver image of the Virgin which hung round her neck night and day.

But had Nina studied effect alone in the arrangement of her costume the result could not have been more triumphant.

Madama's fancy was certainly a happy one. Nina looked superb. The veil was still thrown back. Her cheeks were slightly flushed, the creamy whiteness of the rest of her face throwing up with great advantage the faint colour. Her magnificent eyes shone like diamonds, a beautiful, restless, unnatural light, and though the deep crimson of her lips whispered a little of inward fever, how exquisite they looked! Slightly parted, as in a half-panting way she leaned upon the balustrade, the delicate row of pearls between gleamed out, heightening their vivid colour. In one hand she held a handsome black fan, the other was lightly pressed against her side.

But with all this magnificence of beauty there was something in her manner which effectually checked the words of admiration ready to burst from the two idolizing old women.

Had the admiration made its way the chances are that Nina would have stared blankly, for when she thus attired herself she had never looked in her glass but once, and that once for one purpose only, to ascertain whether the lace of the mantilla was thick enough to act as a mask. This she proved beyond a doubt; of all else in her appearance she was utterly careless excepting only a faint wish that she might be dark and sombre enough to pass in the streets unnoticed even by a glance.

She placed in Margherita's hands the bag of dollars given her by Maestro Capri, gently kissed madama, and signing to her nurse to follow, descended the stairs without uttering a word.

Madama never forgot the burning of those lips on her own cool, withered cheek. She followed the two downstairs.

"Through the garden," said Nina briefly.

And instead of going out by the principal entrance they passed through a side door which, leading into the garden, took them by a shrubby gate into a small street just off the Piazza d'Oro. To reach this gate they must pass the windows of the morning room,

and madama looking in, and seeing her husband still standing at the window with folded arms and knitted brows went up, and touching his arm to rouse him from his reverie, pointed out Nina coming along the garden path.

"See then, marito mio, does she not look like a young Spanish Queen? What grace! What nobility! What a royal step she has."

But the goldsmith suddenly cut her short.

"Who has done that?" he exclaimed, looking at Nina with vexation and distress.

"Done what?" said madama aghast.

"Dressed her in all that black," he answered, his eyes still fixed on Nina's sable robes.

"Nay, then," said madama, half offended that her especial fancy should be called "all that black," "who should dress her but her own taste? She chose it for herself; even Margherita was not with her. Not but what I think it most suitable and becoming. Plenty of Spanish damsels are to be seen daily in the Toledo, though none so richly attired, and as for the face— Ah, well," with a sigh of disappointment, "that unfortunately will not be seen."

"But why so black?" said the goldsmith, still anxiously, but with less vehemence than before.

"Nay, I cannot tell; possibly on account of the mantilla. The child has a very dread

of having her lovely face seen, and the lace which covers it now would defy the eyes of Argus. She might as well be a Hottentot under that covering."

"She gave no reason, then," said the goldsmith, "for such an unusual dress?"

"None, indeed," replied madama. "She has never opened her lips, save to give me a kiss, since she put it on; and truth to tell, the child is so unlike herself this morning, that I can scarcely venture to ask her a question. Besides, my friend, did you not impress upon me not to trouble her with remarks or objections to anything she did?"

"True, true," he answered quickly. "You were right to say nothing. Poor young thing," he added, looking after her with a sigh, "'tis early days for trouble to come thick and fast upon her."

"But say then, dear husband, what new trouble dost thou know of?" said madama, looking into her husband's face with eager curiosity.

"Did you not tell me," he answered, in a sharp tone, "that she was almost heart-broken at something Father Francesco had given her to do?"

"I did," replied madama meekly; "but you seemed to think nothing of it then."

The goldsmith made no answer to this home-thrust, but, giving a last look out of the window, exclaimed—

"It is too late now for Giacomo. I have made up my mind. I will go and seek him at the prison."

"It is curious," said madama, with a demure manner, "that our pretty Nina seemed as anxious for his appearance this morning as thyself."

"Did she?" said the goldsmith, turning quickly round, with a gratified expression. "Ah, little pet, if she has trouble we must only help her through it; make it as light as we can for her. Happily youth forgets in spring that it ever was winter."

And, with this wise axiom upon his lips, the goldsmith donned his broad-brimmed Tuscan hat, took a silver-mounted cane in his hand, and left the house.

Madama remained alone with her thoughts, and very worrying companions they were. Her usual resource in all cases of perplexity and trouble was the elderly female before mentioned, who had been Giacomo's nurse, and was now his mother's prime minister. But for once Catterina was not consulted. Madama had discretion enough to know that the unusual events of the morning had better be kept as much as possible to themselves. Up to this moment the goldsmith's household knew Nina only as their mistress's niece, and were not a little proud of her exquisite grace and beauty. To mention anything that had happened would inevitably



entail explanations which could not be given, so madama was wisely silent. But she went about her various employments listlessly, her mind entirely preoccupied, trying to piece together the scraps of information which she possessed.

The hours went by, and Nina and Margherita were still absent. At midday the goldsmith returned. He had seen Giacomo, and the fact appeared to afford him infinite comfort.

"Giacomo would be up in the evening," he said; "imperative duty had prevented him from coming before."

Certainly the goldsmith's visit to the prison had not been the result of any modified views regarding the French government; neither had it effected any change in his opinions; for during dinner, which he and his wife took alone, after waiting an hour for the truants, he railed unceasingly at the whole system of the Imperial policy, and most especially the military laws. True that he spoke under his breath, but his words were not the less emphatic for that.

After dinner he betook himself to his warehouse, and remained there, so he said, till his usual hour of returning. Madama watched and waited, and waited and watched, till her very heart was sick. No Nina, no Margherita.

"What can they be doing?" said the un-

happy lady, looking out of the window for the twenty thousandth time. "The child will be dead with fatigue, and perhaps half starved. Surely Margherita will make her eat. She is certain to look after her own dinner, and I gave her such cautions."

The weather changed, too, in the afternoon. Heavy thunder clouds came up; there was a storm and a deluge of rain, which continued, though not violently, all the afternoon. The wind chopped round to a bleak quarter, the sky was leaden, the atmosphere hazy; everything looked damp and miserable. It got so cold that madama, moving from one room to another, added shawl after shawl, till they ceased to afford any warmth to her chilled blood.

"I will have a fire lighted in the little saloon," she said. "The Padrone will like it; he detests damp and cold."

So a fire was kindled in the eating chamber, which contained a hearth for burning wood, and very pleasant it looked, with the great red logs piled on the andirons.

"Oh, that dear child!" ejaculated madama in despair. "Where can she be?" For it was beginning to get dark, and still no one came. "She *must* have been out in some of this rain. She will get cold; she will have a fever. Oh, that she were home!"

She went up into Nina's room and ferreted out warm, dry garments, and brought them

down and hung them before the cheerful blaze, and roasted them to her heart's content. She drew a comfortable lounging chair up to the fire, and put cushions on the back and a footstool in front, and a little table at the side, that weary Nina might not have to rise, even to eat her supper.

The little saloon, as it was called, had many comforts and "cosinesses"—may I be allowed the word?—not often found in Italian houses; but the goldsmith had passed a year or two of his youth in England, his patron being anxious that he should learn the art of the massive jewellery peculiar to that country, and of which he himself was completely ignorant.

Young Capri had there imbibed a great liking for comfort. He declared that he saw no reason why he should not warm himself at a cheerful fire if the evening were cold, whether in England or Italy; and when he became his own master and succeeded to his benefactor's house in the Piazza d'Oro, he had one room remodelled entirely with a view to warm, cheerful evenings throughout the winter. And very warm and cheerful it was, and many a gossiping friend dropped in to enjoy Maestro Capri's bright fire and pleasant conversation, when their own little charcoal stoves had quite failed to produce a glow through their numbed limbs. Doubtless, many would have followed his example,

but firing is an expensive article in Naples, and the houses are not generally constructed for its use. The wealthy goldsmith could afford the whim if he chose.

At last madama's patience was rewarded. There was a knock at the door, and betaking herself as fast as her feet could carry her to the hall, she heard Margherita's cracked voice issuing imperative orders.

"Giannetta, bring a small lamp here, and light that in madamigella's chamber; quick now, madamigella is wet and tired; and tell the Padrona—Oh! there you are, signora."

And madama hurried forward with words of greeting and sympathy.

"I thought you would never come, darling; wet and tired? Yes, indeed, I can well believe it; take her up stairs, Margherita, I have dry things ready." And she hurried back and seized the overdone garments, and trotted up joyfully with her burden, and much self-gratulation at her foresight.

Nina had not positively been out in the rain, Margherita had taken care of that, but the streets were flooded, and her thin shoes were literally soaked through.

"She would not get into a calesso," said Margherita aside to madama, "I cannot tell why."

Nina said little. She shivered slightly, and madama never rested till she had got her dry and warm, safely ensconced in the

comfortable nook which she had prepared for her.

The old lady was more than repaid for her careful kindness when Nina sank back on the cushions murmuring —

“How warm and pleasant.”

But she still shivered, though it could not be with cold.

Then said madama to herself —

“She is over-weary; I must give her something to send the blood quicker through her veins.” And thereupon she concocted a mysterious compound, fragrant and steaming, most probably what we in England should call simply hot brandy and water, only that instead of giving it that unpretending name, and preparing it by pouring the ingredients into a tumbler on the table, madama pressed into her service a small brown pipkin, which she put upon the fire, and in which she performed a series of anxious mixings and stirrings, highly commendable in a professed cook or apothecary’s apprentice.

Be it known to such of my readers as have not had an opportunity of judging for themselves, that the Italian mind, especially the Italian mind feminine, revels in a pipkin. They enjoy no cookery so much as that prepared by themselves in a pipkin. It will serve for everything which they most delight to eat. Given any crude materials, a

pipkin, and a charcoal stove, and they will produce a magnificent dish. The pipkin proper is round and clumsy, of a reddish-brown colour, rough outside, smoothly glazed inside; sometimes standing on three little squat feet turned painfully out like the first position of a child's dancing lesson, and possessing handles like two little, fat arms glued to its sides; sometimes guiltless of limbs altogether.

Over a small edition of this wonderful vessel, madama now bent fondly, like an alchemist searching for the gold in his crucible.

The stirrings and shakings over, she prepared to test the quality of her mixture by testing it. She did so, once, twice, and thrice, solemnly nodding her head each time, as if wishing her own good health. Then pronouncing it with much unction, *Una bevanda eccellentissima*, she poured it into a cup, or rather small basin, of rare old china, and proceeded to offer it to Nina.

The latter, who had lain in her chair with half-closed eyes, neither seeing nor noticing madama's activity, drank it eagerly, it was warm and stimulating, and she was so utterly weary and heart-sick, and its aromatic fragrance seemed to promise something like energy. Then she lay back again on her cushions, her heavy eyes closed, and in a few minutes she was asleep.

Madama looked at her long and earnestly. What was it in the slumbering face, that made the old lady's heart sink with an indefinite fear? The round cheek, surely not so round as it had been at this time yesterday, though madama had often seen it white as alabaster, had certainly never before looked the colour that it looked now; the black rings under her eyes were darker and lower than they had ever been, even the day after her arrival, when she lay a prostrate and almost inanimate body, worn out with fever and fatigue; and there was a twitching about the muscles of the face, which madama could not comprehend, and did not like. But as Nina slept on she became more composed, and the ruddy firelight brought a reflected glow to the pale face and banished the death-like whiteness, and seeing that she was likely to remain in her present condition for some time, Signora Capri slipped away to hold a private conference with Margherita, and learn the events of the day.

But Margherita could tell but little, though having warmed and comforted herself with a plentiful supper of fried fish and mulled wine, she was in the humour to be communicative to the uttermost.

They had been to endless strange places, she informed madama, but not a word of explanation or enlightenment had come to her. Madamigella had a paper written out by

Father Francesco, with directions; this Margherita knew for she had seen it; Margherita could read and write, and was not a little proud of her scholarship; therefore the young Duchessa was in safe hands; where the Padre told her to go must be right, but why she went, or with what result Margherita could not say. Madamigella always saw those she went for alone; she (Margherita), was left in a lobby, or an ante-chamber, sometimes below stairs, sometimes in the entrance hall, sometimes even outside the door. Some of the places they went to she knew, others she had never heard of before. And for the most part those that she did know filled her with more surprise than those that she did not. For instance, they went to the police court, and her young lady was closeted with the Commandatore for nearly an hour. What could she want with *him*? Then they went to a printing office; that too was a marvellous place to fix upon, unless madamigella were writing a book; what could the Padre have sent her there for? But so it was, and set down in his own handwriting whom she was to see, and she saw him.

“And you heard nothing, Margherita, of the business that took her there? Not a word dropped? No allusion?”

“Nothing whatever, signora. Of course it was not for me to ask the young Duchessa questions. She has Father Francesco’s au-



thority for what she does, and doubtless his injunctions to keep the matter secret, otherwise I feel sure she would tell me, for she tells me everything—little darling!”

“And how did she act—how did she bear herself with these strangers?” said madama anxiously. “You must have seen them meet and speak at any rate.”

“Like a young queen,” said Margherita triumphantly. “I wish, madama, you could have seen the Commandatore of Polezia take leave of her. I know not if he had seen her face, not when I was present, but from her very walk one can tell that she is beautiful, and madamigella was in his private room, and I saw the door open, and she came walking through like a princess, and the Commandatore bowed to the ground with his hand upon his heart, and all the idlers around he scattered away, and attended her down the steps, and never put his cap upon his head all the time. And to see my young lady turn round with such a graceful salute, and reach out her little hand to him, and he kissed it as if she had been Queen of Naples. I wonder where she got such courtly ways, she could not learn them in the convent.”

“Got them?” echoed madama bridling. “Why they came to her with the blue blood that runs in her veins. That is easy seen. And where else, good Margherita, tell me quick—where did you go besides?”

"We went to shops of various merchandise," said Margherita, "and difficult enough it was to get in, for most of them were shut, keeping holiday; but I know the private entrance to many of them, and the owners too; and no true Neapolitan will send a good piece of business from his doors, be the day what it will; and my young lady ordered many curious articles, as I thought, but it was not for me to interfere; and I know not if they are to be sent here or where, we shall see. But I should have said that we went first to a money-changer's, and all the Padrone's dollars were changed into Napoleons."

"Do not use that word, Margherita," said the signora testily.

"Well, well, signora, I will say gold pieces then; and after that my young lady took the bag herself, and what she did with the money I don't know, but I believe it is all gone. I have not seen any since we returned."

The signora looked rather grave.

"And Margherita did you make her eat? I kept the Padrone waiting an hour for his dinner, hoping to see you back."

"Well signora, if I did not, 'twas not for want of trying. I took her to the best eating house in Naples, and I ordered the most delicious of dishes; and I declared with gravity, that if she ate not, I would myself

sit and starve. Santa Maria! and starving it would have been truly, for I was well-nigh famished, so she consented, and I helped her plentifully, and then set to work on my own plate; and when I had finished I looked up, and she had barely eaten a mouthful. She confessed herself without appetite, but thirsty; she drank some wine and then hurried me away."

This was the substance of Margherita's communication, and madama having heard all, hastened back to her sleeping charge.

She was just stirring, and Maestro Capri and Giacomo, entering together effectually roused her. Supper came, but the woful want of appetite Margherita had complained of, was still evident. Yet Nina tried to exert herself and seem cheerful, especially to Giacomo, who was soon deep in a dissertation on the prison he commanded, its formation, rules, and manner of watch and ward.

Nina seemed so interested, that Giacomo was induced to dilate at some length on a subject that evidently pleased her.

This was nothing new, for she had always been interested in Giacomo's occupation; but madama noted with intense satisfaction, that even weariness and dejection seemed to disappear while Nina talked with her handsome son.

During supper, Giacomo took from his

waistcoat pocket a number of miscellaneous articles and laid them on the table.

One among them caught Nina's eye.

"Do you indeed carry a golden key, Messere Giacomo? I have heard of such things, but never saw one before. Please to let me look at it," holding out her hand.

"Alas! signorina," replied Giacomo, "I fear, like many other apparently precious things, my golden key will not bear inspection. So many objects in this world show like glittering gold, and, when tested, turn out like my key to be only brass. Often worse; for the brass on my key is only a case, inside is true steel."

He handed it to her, and she saw that the brass was only laid over the real metal which formed the key; the wards were steel alone.

"Why put brass over it?" she asked.

"I cannot tell," replied Giacomo. "It is the invention of a famous Florentine locksmith; the brass answers some purpose, to me a mystery."

"And what treasure is under the guardianship of this wonderful key?" said Nina, with somewhat like a smile on her pale face.

"Nothing more precious, bellissima, than my own unworthy self. It is a master key which opens all the doors of my own quarters. By means of this I can go in and out without anyone in the prison knowing it. There is a small door in a side street, Strada Vesuvio,

which is the entrance to a little passage leading straight to my sitting-room. The door is of immense thickness, and barred and clamped with iron in every direction. Half-a-dozen bolts are drawn on the inside, but with this key I defy them all. It unlocks a sliding panel in the door."

Nina gave a sigh of fatigue.

"It must be very difficult," she said; "do you ever use it?"

Giacomo laughed.

"A baby might do it," he said. "I use it constantly, yet without the secret of this key, engineers might hammer at the door in vain. It is by means of this talisman that I have been enabled to come out here so often at unusually early hours. I am supposed to be still asleep and no one disturbs me. Were my constant absences known it might cause laxity and disorder in the prison. As I visit all parts of the building at irregular times, it is no wonder if I am not always to be found in my own rooms."

Nina was examining the key attentively.

"But this panel you speak of," she said, "surely it must be known. Are you not seen going in and out?"

"No," replied Giacomo, "for though I say the door is in Strada Vesuvio, in reality it is in a narrow curved passage which runs out of Strada Vesuvio. No one but myself ever enters that passage, for it only leads to the

prison, and is, in fact, private. Anyone found there would certainly be seized as an escaped prisoner, or at any rate the accomplice of one."

"But the inside," suggested Nina, "surely you must be seen from there. Do the warders know it?"

"Not a soul in Naples knows it," he answered, "except myself, the Superintendent of prisons, my father, and now yourself, bellissima; and as it only leads to my own rooms no one can see me enter. The artificer who constructed the door did not know for what it was intended; and the workmen who fitted it to its place see in it only a strong door, with the usual bars and bolts befitting a prison."

Giacomo had dropped his voice when he began explaining the secret of the key, and madama, with exemplary discretion, engaged her husband in a hot argument on some important matter, so that the conversation of the younger couple was quite indistinct. But with a sudden thought, Nina, who appeared to have no objection to the low-toned dialogue, exclaimed aloud —

"But the key-hole, messere, there must be a key-hole; how is that accounted for?"

"Ah! gentilissima," said Giacomo laughing, "I am telling you all my secrets. But you are a safe confidante."

Even as Giacomo spoke he felt that it was

unwise in him to make known this secret; which in truth belonged more to the prison than himself; but refuse Nina anything she asked? Voluntarily to refuse breath, and so suffocate and die, would have been an easier undertaking.

Giacomo had not in any way alluded to Nina's unusual expedition into the city; evidently the goldsmith had made his son acquainted with all that had taken place, and more, too, madama thought, from the glances of intelligence that occasionally passed between them.

Also in the manner of both father and son was a kind of reverential pity, utterly inexplicable to the good lady, as her husband had completely ignored and put aside all that she had tried to tell him of Nina's supposed illness. It was plain that whatever he knew his son knew also, and both were of the same opinion and acting on the same plan. Any subject that seemed to interest their guest was determinately kept to; every fancy was humoured; and had Nina expressed a wish to inspect the prison herself, madama felt sure that Giacomo would scarcely have denied her. Certainly the mysterious occurrences of the morning seemed in anything but a fair way of being cleared up.

Not the least strange part of the matter was, that Nina herself seemed to be quite

unaware that she was an object of any more interest than common, and madama could see with a glance that this unconsciousness was not assumed. She exerted herself immensely to appear as cheerful as usual, and apparently thought that she had succeeded. And the goldsmith and his son, on the other hand, seemed equally anxious that she should suspect nothing uncusomary in them. Altogether it was the most inexplicable riddle that it had ever been madama's fate to puzzle over. To say that she was burning with curiosity would but faintly express her feelings. Yet she was neither vexed nor offended at not being taken into the confidence of her husband and son. She was a very easy-going, amiable old lady, who had never in her life heard of the rights of women, and would not have understood them if she had. Indeed, what we enlightened children of the present day call by that name, the simple old Italian of eighty years ago would have considered bitter and deadly wrongs. To be forced from the seclusion of her pretty, pleasant home, made to give an opinion on matters beyond the grasp of a feminine mind, to confuse her brain with dry learning, and weary her body with painful work, incapacitated for both by the same law of nature which made her a woman, not a man, she would have cried



out against the injustice and cruelty of such a sentence, and prayed for slavery in a Siberian mine at once, where she would at least know the extent of her misery, rather than a destiny where each difficulty surmounted was only the prelude to another.

I do not imagine that the quaint idea of breaking a butterfly on the wheel had ever been mooted in madama's generation; yet it would not have expressed inaptly her opinion of the effects of a triumphant consummation to the rights of women.

Not that madama in the least considered herself as belonging to a frivolous or inferior class. Quite the contrary. She had an enormous respect for her own sex.

"A woman's wit," she would say, "a woman's tact is indispensable for the conducting of any delicate business." Or she would argue, "Women are the beautiful part of the creation, and its highest form too; are not the archangels represented with female faces beautiful and holy?"

Nothing offended her more than forming a low standard of women's capabilities and destiny, and she had but a poor opinion of the man who held them in little reverence; she would say "Where is the wonder? He judges them by himself." Yet the idea of female doctors, lawyers, and statesmen would have shocked and disgusted her beyond expression.

"How lowering, how degrading!" would have been her remark, in much the same tone as if she saw a young girl of gentle breeding racing through the streets with a set of rough boys. And proportionately as she felt the impossibility of herself and her compeers overcoming the difficulties, moral and physical, surrounding these masculine careers did she appreciate the strength and wisdom of those who accomplished them so easily.

"The judgment of a sensible man," she once observed, "is a rock to lean upon. He has a thousand eyes, and sees above, and below, and before, and behind all at the same time; while a woman—ah! well, if she is worthy of the name, she never sees but one thing—the thing she loves!"

It was not likely, therefore, that holding these opinions, madama would cavil at any line of conduct pursued by her husband and son. If they kept her in the dark on any matter, she believed implicitly that it was for her good: to save her annoyance or give her a pleasant surprise; and she now felt sure that whatever they thought or suspected concerning her darling she would be told in good time. The irritation of unslaked curiosity was in a measure balanced by the ecstatic satisfaction she experienced at Nina's prolonged conversation with Giacomo; but hearing the question now asked aloud con-

cerning the key, she was in great trepidation lest Giacomo might consider it too important a secret to make known, for he certainly had never told it to *her*, and she was relieved when she heard him explaining the mystery of one lock inside another, so that one key-hole did for both.

“And there can be no harm done any way,” said madama to herself, “for the child does not comprehend one word of what he is saying, and does not care about it either; it is only her little imperious way of finding out everything. How weary she looks, little dear. But through all how beautiful!”

And soon after Nina rose. Margherita was called, and carried her young mistress off to bed: madama following, with a thousand injunctions, and determined to see with her own eyes that all the additional comforts she had invented for her guest's weariness were properly carried out.

Having satisfied herself on this point, the busy old lady trotted down again, to make a few household arrangements before retiring to rest herself. Coming noiselessly down the stairs without a light she was neither heard nor seen. At the door of the supper-room she suddenly stopped. Giacomo and his father stood together in the middle of the room; the goldsmith's hand was on his son's shoulder, and they were looking into each other's eyes with a terrified, scared

expression, under which on the face of both was immense poignant grief. It was evident that the mask maintained throughout the evening was now off.

Madama paused; not in the least to hear what had been kept from her, but from uncertainty whether to interrupt them by entering. And then she heard Giacomo say in a very low voice —

“It is terrible!”

And the goldsmith echoed —

“It is terrible, indeed, in every way, for every reason.”

Then Giacomo spoke again —

“What ought we to do?”

“Wait till Father Francesco returns,” said the goldsmith decisively.

“But if he remains long away?” urged Giacomo.

“Then,” said his father, “we must do the best we can ourselves. I thought this morning,” he added, “whether or not to tell your mother; I decided not. It would only pain her and do no good.”

“Certainly not,” said Giacomo; “keep her in ignorance as long as possible.”

Madama had begun to be seriously frightened by this time, but was reassured by seeing her husband smile and whisper something in Giacomo’s ear.

“You think so?” said the latter, turning first a deep dahlia colour and then quite white.

"I have seen more unlikely things," said the goldsmith walking to the fire.

"It is some annoyance," thought madama, "some trouble, perhaps, in the Government, which they want to keep from me and the little darling up there. How good and considerate of them; how happy am I to have such a husband and such a son!"

Before slipping away madama peeped in once more. The goldsmith stood by the fire-place intently watching the white ashes on the hearth. The smile was quite gone from his face, and it looked very grave and troubled. Giacomo was seated. His elbow leaned on the table; his face was hidden in his hand. The whole figure bespoke dejection.

"Strange," thought madama; "if it be so sad a business as it seems at this moment to be, what can they have to smile about? And Giacomo looked pleased when he flushed up just now. I am beginning to feel quite curious."

(The good old lady had been bursting with curiosity since morning.)

At that moment, with a heavy sigh, Giacomo moved his hand. His face was pale now, and the same great grief clouded it. Madama wished that she had not taken that last look. She felt very chilled and uncomfortable as she glided up the stairs.

## CHAPTER IV.

A FEW days passed, still marked by Nina's mysterious excursions to the city; varied, however, on this point, that she returned more frequently, sometimes twice or thrice in the course of the day. For what purpose no one knew; for though on these occasions she sometimes changed her dress, sometimes rested half an hour and generally collected papers, or other articles, which she carried with her on again leaving the house, still, to Margherita's mind, an uncommonly sbrewd one, none of these reasons were sufficient to account for her return.

"Why should she change her dress so often?" said the dissatisfied nurse in a private conference with madama; "and always in some sort of disguise. 'Tis beyond me. And as for fatigue, there are dozens of resting-places to be had without coming all this way. And such twistings and turnings as she uses! Back streets and passages such as I should never dream of taking her through. But she *will* go where she pleases. And continually looking about, and starting and trembling, and hurrying on as if some-one were watching or lying in wait for her. The child is half-demented. I would it were all over, or the Padre had condescended to

explain a little what he has given her to do. And, truth to tell, my old bones are beginning to ache. I hinted as much to her last night, and she looked at me in such a sad, queer way, and said in such a weary tone that I should soon rest, as the principal burden was for herself only, that I could have bitten my tongue out for speaking; and when I tried to make her understand that I thought more of her than myself I might as well have talked to a statue, for I found after some minutes that her eyes were fixed, and her ears closed apparently, for she answered never a word, and I believe heard none. So I left her to herself, and sat quiet by the door till she should move; and at last, with a great sigh, she turned round, looking as if she had just woke out of a sleep, and seemed quite to have forgotten all I had said."

Margherita spoke in the same sharp way she had always done, but there was serious anxiety both in her face and manner. Every day matters seemed to take a graver turn.

Every day Nina's face grew paler, her eyes larger, her lips more feverish, her hands more trembling; yet she never relaxed her exertions, and never complained.

Every day Giacomo's visits were more hurried, his face more clouded, his manner more perplexing. Every day the goldsmith became more taciturn and preoccupied;

seldom entered his warehouse, but was constantly absent on mysterious business, the nature of which never transpired.

One day Margherita brought home more significant news than she had yet communicated to madama.

Both the old women had been troubled of late at the long periods of waiting which Margherita had spoken of, when Nina entered some house, and she, Margherita, was left alone for an enormous length of time.

These absences had increased in number and length, till at last they stretched to the length of several hours; and often when Nina returned, Margherita reported that she seemed exhausted and saddened, as if fresh from some arduous exertion of mind and body, instead of the simple conversation which she professed to have been holding with an invisible friend.

But on this occasion Margherita had seen and heard something, which roused her suspicions.

Nine had gone, closely veiled as usual, to a house in an obscure street, and there enquired for a name which was written in Father Francesco's list.

She gave some directions, unintelligible to Margherita, to the person who admitted them; and the latter, after disappearing to make inquiries, had returned, and in a broken and Frenchified Italian, had re-



requested "madame." to step into another room.

Nina had followed him, and they passed through folding doors, which were insecurely fastened, indeed scarcely shut tight.

Through these doors Margherita had distinctly heard her young mistress talking in French with an unmistakable French masculine voice; and though Margherita neither spoke nor understood the language, yet from constantly hearing it, she had learnt some forms of expression, and could judge something of the speaker's meaning from the tone of his voice, and she gave it as her unalterable opinion that the Frenchman who talked within there with Duke Castellano's daughter, was neither a new acquaintance nor a disagreeable one.

This was appalling indeed, and was rendered worse by the conclusion. Her mistress did not appear again for several hours; and during that time she had distinctly heard her sobbing violently, and the Frenchman's voice in accents of soothing and entreaty.

And when at last the door opened again, Margherita, gazing eagerly through it, saw at the further end of a large room, a tall man with a dark moustache curved at the ends, unmistakably French, and large dark eyes, intently watching madamigella as she flitted through the doorway.

Margherita further deposed, that embol-

dened by curiosity and terror, she had questioned her mistress as to this man; but she only got the enigmatical answer, "He is part of my penance." As to whether he were French or Italian she received no answer at all.

Madama was horribly shocked at this revelation. Objectionable enough in itself, what might it not forebode? She endured a perfect agony of longing for Father Francesco's return, which seemed to be the only chance of setting all these crooked matters straight.

She even at last succeeded in interesting her husband in Nina's mysterious doings; but it had only the effect of making him more anxious than before; he positively refused to interfere in any way.

Margherita had not been mistaken. What she had heard through the imperfectly closed doors was no delusion.

Nina followed the servant who had informed his master previously that *une Dame Espagnole*, for Nina that day wore her Spanish dress, *Voiléé mais bien elegante*, was desirous to speak with him, and the occupant of the room raised his eyes, half indifferently, half impatiently to see what disturbing triviality had come to break in upon his graver thoughts and occupations.

But there was something in the look of the veiled figure that made him start as with

an electric shock, and advance towards her with a manner very different to the quietly courteous one with which he would have received any unknown feminine visitor. The blood rushed tumultuously to his heart, leaving his face white and his hands cold.

So closely veiled that not a feature was visible, yet the height, the air, the exquisite feet, the tiny alabaster hands, the indescribable grace of every movement, told him that the most beautiful of earthly creatures stood before him, and the whispers of his own heart warned him that his fate whether for good or evil was face to face with him now.

Nina at first believed the room to be empty, but the suddenly moving figure made her turn her eyes to the other end. The figure stopped, gazing at her breathlessly; with a sudden cry she called out his name, and the momentary indecision ended, Chevelure sprang forward and seized her hands in his own to make sure that it was she indeed and no phantom which stood before him.

But not content with this, he drew away the heavy lace from her features, and there in its incomparable beauty, was the face which had never ceased to haunt him, day or night.

He did not ask what brought her there; he forgot the anxiety of his thoughts a moment before, forgot the attendant perplexities of her appearance at that especial time, the dis-

tressing revelations which it had often chafed him to think he must make to her should they ever meet again, forgot all the wise resolves with which he had fortified himself in the event of such meeting, forgot everything but that she was there before him, his realized ideal, his incarnate dream, the most beautiful form, and the most heroic soul that earth had ever called her own.

And intoxicated with the fulfilment of his long deluded hope, and seeing her there of her own accord, alive and well, and so unutterably lovely, and so unmistakably mindful of him, and all the memories that attached to him, is it any wonder that he forgot his reserve and caution, and the daily and hourly schoolings he had given himself, and the decision of many a long reverie, and the voice of his soberer judgment, and that the next moment saw him kneeling before her, clasping those passive hands, scarcely conscious of what he did, and pouring out his frantic joy and adoration in words which none but a being more or less than woman could have heard unmoved for five minutes.

But Nina was both. More, in her unselfish resolve to sacrifice her all in a noble cause, in the silent and heroic martyrdom she suffered daily and hourly, in the unflinching determination to achieve what she had begun; less, in that a woman's unalienable right, the magnetic power of loving because

beloved, had died out of her. She had acted upon that right once, and had found herself utterly and horribly mistaken.

The heart which she had given away so entirely in exchange as she fancied for a magnificent gift far beyond it in value, had been returned to her, not wanted; the supposed gift was a passing shadow, and the poor rejected heart had come back to her, in such a bruised and wounded condition, so battered and crushed out of all shape and semblance to a heart, that it had, so to speak, only vitality enough left to die.

It was not dead yet; strong stimulants were keeping it alive; but it was the galvanic life which a powerful will sometimes retains in a human body till a great wish is accomplished; then sudden collapse and extinction.

Miserably sensitive on one subject, on all others her feelings seemed numbed. And now, trying to collect her ideas, and looking down on Chevelure's glowing, upturned face, and listening to his rapturous words, all it brought to her was the memory of another face, and other words, rendered suddenly vivid by their association with those before her; and the poor dying heart, springing again into spasmodic life, fell once more into agonised convulsions.

Up to this moment Nina's work had had mostly the effect of a nightmare, a some-

thing painful and oppressive, under which lurked an indistinct horror, as yet vaguely felt and dimly seen, for those she had met, and that she had done, had been principally business people and business details; to encounter one of her fellow adventurers of that dreadful night was a trial she had never expected, and for which she was quite unprepared.

The name by which Chevelure was placed in Father Francesco's list was an Italian one, and his appearance at that moment amazed and shocked her more than if he had suddenly entered madama's sitting-room.

Roused confusedly from her engrossing memories by his impetuous manner, trying to unite the past and present, and understand this unusual vehemence, connecting it in some way with Claud and her lost happiness, she failed in her endeavour to maintain a grave and businesslike dignity; attempted to speak, broke down, and burst into that hysterical sobbing which Margherita had heard and reported.

Chevelure's distress was almost ludicrous. Wakened to a biting sense of his own selfish forgetfulness, he poured out lamentations and regrets, entreaties for pardon, promises to speak no more till she bade him, frantic terror at the effect of his indiscretion, efforts to soothe, &c., and all the time racked with curiosity as to why she had come, the true

cause of her agitation, and what she knew, whether anything, everything, or nothing.

Nina herself was almost as unconscious of his apologies as she had been of his transgression, it was the sudden opening of a bandaged wound that had overcome her, and when at last with immense efforts she had regained composure her principal anxiety was to account in some reasonable way for her sudden weakness.

"She had been ill," so she excused herself, "and was still weak, and at this moment tired from over-exertion and anxiety for the last few days;" and then, without further prelude, she plunged at once into the matter which brought her there.

She detailed straightforwardly how she had heard of Claud's danger, her extreme distress and anxious determination to save him if possible, spoke of her undying gratitude to him and all who had aided her in her terrible extremity, and ended by entreating Chevelure to give her the details of his arrest and condemnation, of which she knew nothing.

All the time she spoke Chevelure was turning in his mind the probability of how much she knew, and whether it would fall to his lot to tell her the miserable tale which she must soon know, even if ignorant of it at present.

"She cannot have heard," he thought.

"Surely she would not look like that if she had."

For Nina was now radiant, her cheeks flushed, her eyes sparkling, her manner animated and resolute; and Chevelure, who had only seen her under the cloud of great bodily fatigue and mental suffering, decided in his own mind that this incomparable creature had trebled her magnificent beauty by rest and freedom from anxiety. She could not, therefore, be aware that the man for whom she was working so untiringly had not only forsaken her, but was actually married to another.

"How am I to tell her?" thought Chevelure. But the knotty point solved itself without his aid.

Nina's last question was whether Claud's assistance to her had been in any way the cause of his present trouble?

Chevelure replied that it was, but tried to soften the bitter truth by saying that he had long been suspected as a secret Royalist, and the most innocent circumstances would have been made to tell against him.

"But I am convinced that it is on that plea that he is condemned," said Nina, with undisguised grief. "I entreat you, monsieur, to tell me the whole—all the particulars. How was it discovered, and by whom? And how soon after our escape? I know nothing but the bare fact. And did anyone else fall



under suspicion?" she added, with hesitation.

Chevelure felt that she alluded to himself.

"I will tell you all, mademoiselle," he said, "in a few words. At first nothing could be better. Ten minutes after Claud left us in the church, he was seen in his usual dress smoking at the door of a well-known *café*, and discussing a quarrel which had taken place a few hours before between two brother officers, and at which everyone believed him to have been present. Indeed, on his trial several witnesses swore most conscientiously to having seen him there the whole time. This was, in fact a man of my regiment, wonderfully like him both in face and figure, who, dressed in Claud's clothes, and, prompted and supported by me, played his part to perfection. We all contrived some thing of the same kind; I appeared at a masked ball in the dress in which I met you, mademoiselle, and as many other dresses of the same kind were there, I purposely made myself known to one or two acquaintances whom I thought would be useful witnesses in case of accident; and I assumed for the moment various peculiarities of voice and manner which I observed were characteristic of my doubles, and consequently these acquaintances swore to my presence in the ball-room during the very time I was awaiting you, first near the cemetery; afterwards

in the church, and while we were traversing the streets, and later still. All would have gone well but for the prying malice of one man, Claud's worst enemy. When the door of your prison was opened at daybreak, great was the consternation at finding it empty, and not a trace of how the escape had been effected. Of course the sentries and the Captain of the Guard were accused of complicity, but they were witnesses for each other, and after the first accusation the absurdity of such an idea made itself evident. The whole guard must have been in the secret, which was impossible. Suspicion then fell on the three who were supposed to be most interested in the prisoner's escape, but thanks to our precautions nothing could be proved. Several weeks passed away without any result, and then the General, instigated and accompanied by the man I speak of, went to inspect the prison room.

"It had been well searched before, but unfortunately hatred and revenge are sometimes keener-sighted than justice and mercy, and crushed under the foot of the table, which must have been accidentally placed upon it, was found at last a scrap of paper in Claud's handwriting.

"It contained nothing in itself sufficient to criminate anyone; it was merely a piece torn from a memorandum of the various roads leading from the cemetery to the city, but

my name, and also Brandenburg's, occurred in the directions."

Chevelure paused, and then said with a slight smile —

"Under the circumstances, it certainly was a suspicious document. The means of escape were still buried in as great darkness as ever; but that we three were concerned in it seemed more than a probability. It was strong evidence."

"And then?" exclaimed Nina, breathless.

Chevelure began to get confused. The unpleasant part was coming.

"Claud was arrested first," he continued. "He haughtily refused to give any account of his proceedings that night; but witnesses came forward and proved his presence in various places at various hours, and though strongly suspected, evidence against him was still unattainable, when, by what villany I know not, the deception of his personality was discovered.

"This decided the matter. Brandenburg and myself were arrested, also the man who had personated Claud. He, this man, was staunch to the backbone; and had it so fallen out that he had been condemned to death, would have gone to be shot without a murmur, rather than betray those to whom he had sworn faith.

"But his obstinate denials were useless. He was supposed to be acting under compul-

sion of his commanding officer, myself, and was dismissed with a caution as to his future conduct.

"After a weary time Brandenburg was liberated for want of evidence; but the proof against Claud was conclusive. He was charged with insubordination, sedition, and treason; convicted and condemned.

"On the same day my sentence was pronounced. It was decided by the Court that I had been ignorant of Claud's reason for delegating his personality to another; had simply considered it a practical joke on mutual friends; and my sword was restored to me with a little speech, intimating that not a shadow rested on my reputation as a soldier and a gentleman. I knew that this was a farce. They were as well aware of my part in the matter as Claud's, but they fear me; I have friends high in office, and a severe sentence on me would not have been passed over lightly.

"I took the sword, broke it over my knee, flung the pieces on the table, and informed the Court that I quitted for ever the service of a Government which sanctioned the murder of women and children, and accused honourable men of treason."

For one moment Nina's eyes flashed with a perfect splendour of brilliancy; she said something softly in Italian, but Chevelure caught the words: "It was well done!"

"An hour later," he resumed, "I had delegated the command of my regiment to the next in rank, and sent in my resignation to the Commander-in-Chief. The same day, I removed from my quarters, came here, and have since been straining every nerve to obtain some mitigation of Claud's sentence; but as yet—in vain.

"The whole affair has been infamously hurried; had there been time to appeal to the Emperor, I might have succeeded even if it had been accorded simply as a personal favour to myself. But I cannot do that letters take too long with all the incidental delays, and if I leave Naples myself, especially if it be known for what purpose, I fear foul play to poor Claud during my absence. He has an enemy so virulent and unscrupulous that no injustice would surprise me. His object I know is Claud's death, his death by any means; formerly disgrace and ruin would have been sufficient, but now his death only will satisfy."

"Why now?" asked Nina calmly.

Chevelure stammered and hesitated; the unpalatable truth must be told.

"His death has become necessary," he commenced slowly. "This man—you must remember him, mademoiselle, that night, he was the cause of all the trouble; without him there would have been no difficulty." Chevelure dropped his voice though there

were none to hear. "He guessed that your detention would implicate Claud, and he had a reason" —

Again Chevelure stopped and hesitated.

"But what reason?" asked Nina gravely.  
"Into what could I possibly enter?"

After a moment's pause Cheveleure replied —

"Could Claud have been convicted of complicity with a spy, such ruin would have come upon him as would have effectually prevented him from carrying out certain plans which were opposed to this man's interests; but now these plans have been in a manner completed, and Claud's death alone can remove an obstacle which" —

Again Chevelure paused, utterly at a loss how to put his unwelcome explanation into words. Nina understood it all. The moment had come. Now the heroic blood of the Castellani must assert itself. Now she must rise to a sublime height, or sink into contempt for ever. She made her resolve, braced up her wavering fortitude, and whispering to herself "It must be all or nothing," turned her face calmly towards Chevelure.

She was sitting when this conversation took place on a low couch, a sort of divan which ran all round the room, with piles of cushions here and there for the convenience of those who chose to use them.

Chevelure had taken a chair beside her,

rather, indeed, in front of her, so that every time she raised her eyes they encountered the full gaze of his. It was impossible, except by a pointed action, to avoid this. Nina knew there could be no half measures; so she lifted her eyes without a sign of emotion and said —

“Is it possible that this man can be the one that Father Francesco mentioned, the one that wanted to marry Monsieur de Meronne’s wife?”

Chevelure sprang from his seat in astonishment, and stood staring at her with such a bewildered expression, that Nina could almost have smiled a melancholy smile at the success of her deception.

“Is it so?” she asked again calmly. “Is this indeed the man to whom I owe that night of agony?”

Chevelure looked steadily down into the very depths of her eyes, but they never quailed, the beautiful features were undisturbed; an anxious curiosity was the only feeling visible in her face.

“It has been a mistake,” he said to himself, while a delirious joy took possession of him, “she must have come to that house for some other reason; she never explained, no one asked, we took it for granted, and poor Claud, he is so accustomed to be idolised, no wonder he thought it, considering the circumstances. And now,” he added, still scan-

ning the lovely countenance before him, "now, I begin to live ; life now means for me hope and joy ?"

He seated himself beside her again and tried to answer her question composedly ; and Nina only saw that her remark had infinitely surprised him, and easily guessed why.

"That is the man," he replied, "and as vile a specimen of humanity as ever breathed the blessed air. But, mademoiselle, pardon me, I did not know that you were aware of Claud's marriage?"

"I have not known it long," she answered with the same unperturbed manner ; "Father Francesco, my confessor, is his wife's uncle, and that is why I have been chosen to complete this undertaking left unfinished by him, for he has suddenly been obliged to quit Naples. Not," she added quickly, "that my confessor's injunctions would have added one grain of weight to my own wishes ; nothing that I can ever do will pay the debt of gratitude that I owe to those who risked life and reputation for me, a forlorn stranger. Now that I see and know everything, the hazard and the loss, how can I requite it?"

The dangerous ground was happily passed, and it mattered little that Nina's voice began to break, her lip trembled, and tears stood in her beautiful eyes.



"For him," she went on hurriedly, "I may do a little if I can save him, and help and befriend his unhappy young wife, as, with Blessed Mary's help, I have sworn to do. But for you, signor, what shall I say? I, so utterly unknown, so entirely without claim even on your compassion; and, yet, for me what have you not done—through me what have you not lost? Every feeling that stirs me seems merged in gratitude, and yet I see what a paltry offering it is!"

She was sitting with clasped hands, looking straight before her, and did not, therefore, notice Chevelure's brown eyes kindling with a hot light, his face growing pale, his hands nervously clasping the back of the chair upon which he leaned. She noticed nothing till she saw him kneeling beside her, and heard him utter strange and amazing words, low-voiced, broken exclamations that told more of the feelings that surged and boiled within than the loudest protestations would have done; short, gasping sentences, half-breathed sighs, sudden pauses, tremblings and mutterings like the convulsive whispers in a tropical forest when the hurricane is at hand. Startled and astonished, she sat still and listened.

He looked up straight in her face, his honest, speaking eyes full upon hers.

"Gratitude! oh, most beautiful among

the beautiful, the miserable word chokes me ! I will not have gratitude, I will have more or nothing. If there must be gratitude it shall be on my side. Are we not grateful for the sun that shines and makes all things glorious ? Are we not grateful for the fresh air, and the cool dew, and the midnight stars ? And shall I not be grateful that I live, and stand, and look on all that is loveliest and noblest in creation, gathered into one being ? Not yet, one moment more," for Nina made some ineffectual efforts to rise, "hear me out. I ask nothing, only a little hope. Oh, exquisite Nina, this is no sudden thing. From the moment my eyes first fell upon you I have felt what I feel now. But I guarded myself jealously, I feared to offend. And I would have been silent still, but the time was too strong for me. Perfect Nina, angel upon earth, only say that you will not turn away from me in anger ; you will let me worship you in silence, and in time, any time, years if it must be, I may begin to hope. Oh, Nina, since I have known you, life has grown so beautiful, so delicious, but I would lay it down at this moment in all its perfection and fulness, if by so doing I might double its brightness for you !"

All this and much more came in a torrent from Chevelure's lips, while Nina, astonished and scared, sat gazing at him helplessly,

unable to utter a syllable, or even collect her thoughts; while he, encouraged by her silence, no longer attempted to command his words or check the tide of pent-up feeling which nearly mastered him.

Nina found her voice at last.

"Signor, I entreat, I implore you, say no more. This is madness. You know nothing of me; you cannot care about a mere stranger. Do not make my heavy debt still heavier. How can I bring myself to say" —

"Say nothing," he interrupted quickly, "but that you give me leave to live. If you take from me all hope, I die."

"You must not hope," she said mournfully, "there is nothing to hope for. I could not if I would, I would not if I could, give any other answer. I dare not, I cannot. Signor, you mistake yourself, you mistake me. I am nothing but a leaf in your path blown onward by the wind; leave me to the way that I must go! You have been dreaming, signor; wake up now. A heart like yours must not waste its richness on a vision. Let it alone, we will end this foolishness. I have come on a different errand."

"You are not going to throw me off entirely?" he said, growing frightfully pale, "you are not going to tell me that you love some other" —

"No, no, no," she gasped, almost shrieking, "none, I shall never marry; I am vowed

to Our Lady. And I am Italian too—Duke Castellano's daughter; and you our bitter enemy, alas! not the less bitter because so great and victorious. And a Frenchman, the friend of our tyrant, the leader of our oppressors. Ah, me! signor, I ought to hate you. I ought to have died before accepting aid from one of your nation. And I would hate if I could, but I cannot. See you not, signor, how hard is my work. How can I tell right from wrong. And listen, there is more yet. We Castellani are bound by a terrible vow to compass the death of every Frenchman who crosses our path. If possible I may help Monsieur de Meronne, for my confessor bids me; and I may come to you for aid, for he has bid me do that also, but no more, no further."

"And afterwards," broke in Chevelure in a soft voice, which effectually concealed the fury that was tearing him, "afterwards perhaps your priest will bid you give me up to his just vengeance, as he will term it, when I can no longer aid his plans. And will you do it if he bids you?"

"He will never bid me, he will never wish it himself. Father Francesco is good and true, such vile treachery would revolt him, even if I had the power to harm, and I have not" —

"But you have taken a vow to destroy us if you can, mademoiselle; remember," and

for a moment a cruel, mocking light came into his eyes, "your future weal depends upon the keeping of that vow ; if you show kindness to a Frenchman your holy saints will discard you" —

"Then I will perish for ever," she said abruptly. "Heaven itself would be no rest with such a gnawing remorse to sting me through eternity. No," she added with energy, "even to gain Heaven and the happiness of the blessed, I would not do that incomparable wickedness. Better the outer darkness for my lonely, lost soul, than the abode of angels bought with the anguish of others, haunted by reproachful eyes, echoing for ever the voices of betrayed friends!"

Wandering after her own wandering thoughts, she seemed to have forgotten Chevelure and the origin of these outspoken dreary thoughts. And he remained, half stooping, half kneeling beside her, silent and motionless, and watching her with intense anxiety.

"And what then?" she went on dreamily, "how the abode of angels? Can remorse gain entrance there? Can the cruel heart and false tongue have place among the holy ones? Shall we find Judas among the hosts of Heaven?"

"There is a mystery here," she continued after a pause. "I cannot solve it. A penalty must be paid. But by them? Never! Shall

I strike at those loyal hearts? Put out the light of those noble natures? Oh, my God, no! Not for an eternity of bliss!"

As Chevelure listened to these unconsciously-revealed workings of her inmost soul, all the bad and angry feeling died out of his face, and was succeeded by an expression which probably had not dwelt there since he was a beautiful, lisping child with his arms round his mother's neck. Many a kind and noble feeling had looked out of those large brown eyes, but reverence, which is akin to holiness, had lain dormant in his nature for want of something to feed upon.

And now the strange thing began to wake and make itself known. He had a dim recollection of an old, old story, told him when a tiny creature, one Christmas Eve, of some angels, who appeared once upon a time to some Jewish shepherds, and brought them glorious news; and he remembered it now, for the sensation of mingled awe and delight with which he listened to it, though forgotten for more than thirty years, was darkly dawning upon him again.

He said nothing, but silently lifted a portion of Nina's mantle which hung near him, and pressed it to his lips, laying it down again tenderly, as if it were a living thing, and precious. The action was more eloquent than a world of words.

Nina had ceased her monologue, and sat

silent, pondering the unsatisfactory matter. And then Chevelure rose up, flushed and quivering.

"Listen to me, my good or evil genius," he said, "for one you are, though I know not which. You shall go what way you will, but I will travel beside you, whether your path lead beyond the stars, or to the depths of Hades. And so the wiseacres have decided to shut up this priceless jewel within cold cloister walls. But that shall not be. That warm heart shall not be crushed into a fungus. That sweet face shall not be hidden from the light of day. I care little who has decreed it; you will find, beautiful Nina, that my arm is stronger than all the drivelling monks and besotted old women in Italy. I will oppose this sacrifice, and it shall not be made. You call me your enemy, oh Nina," and he sank down beside her, "so fair, so tender, so beloved; give me leave to fight for you, to live, to die for you, and you shall see if an unconquerable enemy is not also a mighty friend. Only speak," he continued, the storm within him growing stronger at every word, "and I swear to you by this right hand, that if your ambition is even the throne of Naples, I will seat you there, as surely as you now sit on that couch before me.

"This is no madness," he continued impressively, "I will show you that I can act

as well as speak. Joseph is King—true, but I know that he is destined to rule a wider field than this; and then Naples falls—to whom? To one of the Emperor's favourite officers; and if I choose," he continued with a proud carelessness, "it is mine. I have resigned my rank in the army of the empire, but I can resume it again as easily as I draw on a glove. My services have been great; I will make them greater, so great that nothing I ask shall be denied me. I would not ask as a *favour* a foot of land, or a grain of salt; but I will *demand* a kingdom, and obtain it. Demand it as a right, and keep it with my own strong hand. And, sweet Nina—forgive me if I speak this way to an Italian noble's daughter—surely those wise and beautiful eyes must see that the race of Bourbon is waxing old; the kingdoms of Europe must have more vigorous rulers, and is it not better that the future monarchs of Italy should come of a new stock, grafted with the noblest stem of her own growth? Do you hear me, Nina? Do you understand? I see that you do, and the great soul in you scorns paltry subterfuge and foolish anger. I speak simple facts. Duke Castellano shall return among his own people to advise, and help, and govern; to stand at his daughter's right hand when the crown is placed upon her head. All this wants but one word, one consenting



look. Lift your eyes, beautiful Nina ; open those sweet lips and say. Will you be my queen?"

Never in the most remote form had a suspicion of Chevelure's real feelings occurred to Nina till this day. Imbued with ideas caught from nuns, women utterly ignorant of the ways of the actual world, the little she had learnt concerning the three gradations of a woman's principal business in life—viz., admiration, love, and marriage—was as much opposed to positive fact as the language and manners of a troubadour, at least, as we imagine him, would be to those of a gentleman of the nineteenth century. From the peculiar circumstances of her first meeting with Claud, he had chimed in with her preformed idea, though even in that instance the smallest knowledge of men and things would have shown her discrepancies in his conduct, which would have shaken her confidence in him, to say the least.

But liberated so rudely from that delusion, the result was disbelief even in realities. If latterly, through the instrumentality of Giacomo and his mother, she had awakened somewhat to a sense of her own amazing beauty, that consciousness, with every other conducive to self-appreciation, had been effectually stifled by the discovery of her lamentable mistake.

That Chevelure, the gigantic, gentle guar-

dian of that terrible night, should have thought of her as anything more than a hapless, persecuted stranger, whom he might easily have crushed in his powerful hand, was a bewildering impossibility, and the suddenness of the revelation made the matter still more perplexing.

But there was that about Chevelure that took doubt by storm, and conquered before any defence could be prepared.

The unhesitating way in which he went straight to the point, his earnest eyes, the practical sense of his reasoning, and the indubitable evidence of feelings so violent, though under strong control, that his voice shook, and his countenance changed, like a nervous girl.

Nina never for a moment disbelieved his words, but her belief was only wonder, sorrow, and confusion. She did not comprehend it, and had neither time nor inclination to try. Her only wish was to get rid of the unhappy subject, and return to the matter that brought her there.

Yet she was neither hard nor cold. She looked at Chevelure kneeling beside her, and pitied him, and admired him, and felt for him, and for herself too, as we might feel for the hapless actors in a well-told tale.

She felt for herself as for a third person, one whose sufferings she experienced, and yet could judge of dispassionately.

As to the answer she should give Chevelure there never was a moment of hesitation in her mind, except as to the gentlest and humblest form in which to convey it. A conviction which had strengthened within her during the last few days made such words as she now listened to a meaningless blank. They affected her no more than love passages between her Spanish ancestors of five hundred years past would have done.

Chevelure had moved a little on one side, seeing how it embarrassed her to meet his eyes, for in her face was distress and perplexity, and he could well understand, after what she had told him, how difficult *any* answer must be in her position.

But he was a man of iron will, and though he would humble himself in the dust before her, he would not spare her this answer. Not now certainly, for the question had gone far enough to be beyond recall; he would have a definite reply, and though he felt for her as acutely as if the pain were his own, he would not spare her one tittle.

He knew the strength of his own determination, how in more difficult cases than this he had conquered without a hundredth part of the resolution which possessed him now.

She might falter, and tremble, and linger over it, but in the end she should look in his face, and tell him all that he wanted to

know ; yes, it should be all that he wanted to know, for he was determined to win, and when Chevelure was determined, he smiled at those who attempted to resist.

There was only one possibility of defeat ; if a rival had stood in the way, and she had emphatically declared that there was none. As to other obstacles, he would sweep them off like dust. What matter that they were strangers, enemies, that he did not please her ; that she even disliked, hated, loathed him ?

“ Even if all that were against me,” he thought, “ yet shall she love me. She will not have a choice, for no woman born of earth could resist what I would do to win her.”

Desperate at last, for she felt that the brown eyes were looking into her soul, though she could not see them, Nina turned and faced him.

“ Signor, why will you make me speak, when I can only say what distresses me, and will perhaps anger you ? My answer is already given, the only answer that ” —

“ Not the answer you gave me just now,” he said, returning to her side. “ It was unreasonable. Why do you scorn me ? ”

“ Scorn you ! Oh, signor, you little know what I think of you.”

The faintest reflection of a smile, joyful

and triumphant, played about Chevelure's lips.

"You will not listen to me because I am a Frenchman," he said. "You have been taught that they are tyrants and barbarians."

"True," she answered softly, "and I have learnt that they are the noblest of men."

The smile extended to Chevelure's eyes, and filled them with eloquent light.

"You think me boastful," he resumed, "vainglorious, presuming; you think my picture of the future a cruel insult to a nobly born Italian—it might seem so, but on my honour I declare to you that I had a very different meaning—and my plan for the welfare of Italy a hateful consummation."

She turned to him with kindling eyes.

"Signor, I must be base indeed if I could think of you as anything but the most generous and excellent of mankind, excellent beyond my comprehension, for till I knew you I never knew what human nature was capable of. Insult or cruelty is not in you, and, I will say it fearlessly, I believe no brighter lot could fall to my unhappy country than to see you her King."

The smile deepened on Chevelure's lips, and he seated himself beside her.

"Nina, I love you as I believe no man ever loved woman before; for if every ves-

tige of that wonderful beauty, which might dazzle any man, were taken from you to-morrow, I know that I should love you still. I should regret the loss, for beautiful things are my delight, but your beauty is only part of you, and it is yourself that I want. Knowing you, I cannot live away from you. I could not forget you, even if I tried, and I shall not try, and I cannot go back to the ignorance of those days before I ever saw you. My life will be blank and one-sided unless you share it. I will not take that answer; you must give me another. Do you think me stern, Nina?—self-willed and imperious? You will not think so when you have given me what I ask, what I am determined to have. I know that I can make you happy, and I will not let you throw your happiness away. You are weak, I must be strong, for if I yield I deprive you of the devotion of a heart that can only be content with the one thing it loves.”

He took up Nina’s hand and kissed it.

“You must give me another answer, sweet Nina; that one I utterly refuse.”

Nina sat perfectly silent. His indomitable will paralysed her. She never wavered for a moment in her melancholy resolve, but she had not the power to speak it out.

It seemed such presumption in her feeble self to defy this high-minded, strong-tempered man, and a cruel ingratitude to refuse

what he so earnestly asked, and what to her seemed so valueless. But what could she do? To raise objections would be useless, for he scattered them in air, and without that one explanation, which she determined should never be spoken, she saw that he would not yield.

No feeling of interest in himself mingled with her perplexity. Her mind acknowledged his worth; her heart, dying or dead, could not respond to his.

Suddenly she drew away the hand that he held, and buried her face in the cushions beside her. She uttered no sound, and scarcely seemed to breathe.

After waiting a few minutes Chevelure came round and spoke to her. His voice was music in its gentleness, but carried with it a ring almost of authority.

"I have not offended you, sweet one, I know that I have not. Why do you take your lovely face away from me?"

No answer. After waiting a little he bent down his head and whispered—

"Why may I not look at you? Why will you not look at me?"

Still no answer. A short silence and then Chevelure spoke again. His voice was still wonderfully sweet in its murmuring tones, but mingled with them was just the slightest touch of sternness.

"Nina, this is unjust; you treat me

harshly. What have I done that you turn from me as if I were a leper."

Then she raised her head. Her cheeks were stained, her eyelids wet; some accidental word or look had recalled the numbed heart to consciousness.

"You must tell me the cause of those tears," said Chevelure, reseating himself beside her, "you must not have a grief that I will not remove or a wrong that I will not right."

There was such a manner of quiet proprietorship about him that Nina started up with a little cry thinking that she had in some way unwittingly entangled herself.

"What frightens you?" he said, glancing round the room, "I am here; nothing can hurt you where I am."

"Signor," said Nina, turning to him appealingly, "I am troubled and frightened because you say so much to me that I cannot understand, and know not how to answer. You will not listen to what I wish to say; you confuse me, I cannot think, I cannot explain; I reproach myself, for the work I came to do is still undone, and you, who should have helped, have hindered me. Ask me no more questions, tell me nothing more, let me finish what I have begun. Remember, signor, there is a life at stake while we sit idly here. Let us change the subject. The time is passing, I must go."



She spoke hurriedly, glancing nervously up and down at Chevelure. He bent his tall head to listen to her. Though so confident in his own power, and self-reliant, he was deferential and obedient to her slightest wish as a slave to an empress.

Perhaps he was well satisfied with matters as they stood, for the proprietor-like manner was more visible than before. To her he said —

“I deserve the reproach, my beautiful, I have been selfish and forgetful; but if ever living man had excuse for those sins, I have it this day. I shall work with double zeal now, for shall we not labour together, sweet Nina?”

And to his own heart he said —

“Rejoice, O strong determined heart, exult and triumph. Before a week is over I shall have won her.”

Immensely relieved by Chevelure's compliance with her wish Nina returned at once to the subject, to her so unpleasantly interrupted. She detailed to him the plan she had formed and was now carrying out for Claud's benefit. Her difficulties for want of friends and advisers; her ignorance, her timidity, the necessity of keeping the matter secret from the Capri family, her terror at the thought of discovery and failure, and the length to which she had already advanced. Even with the new-born discomfort of which

he was the cause hanging over her, she could not but feel the satisfaction and repose of possessing such a confidant and counsellor.

He himself listened in astonishment as she enumerated the various items already in operation, or those which she was about to commence.

"And have you done all this alone?" he asked, "with no other help, no other advice?"

"I could not have anyone to help me," she answered almost apologetically, for his words seemed to blame her, "secrecy was so necessary, and for the same reason who could advise me? Have I done anything wrong?"

"Wrong?"

Only with an immense effort he restrained the words that were breaking from his lips, and contented himself with saying —

"You have yet to learn how to do that."

But he looked at her long and earnestly, and muttered something in a language she did not understand.

Still not quite sure whether he approved of her efforts or not, she added in a grave, business-like manner —

"Can you suggest anything else, signor, or advise me in any way?"

In a moment he shook off his reverie and entered heart and soul into the matter.

Nina looked and listened with ever increasing wonder and admiration at the prompt and decided measures he at once adopted, the in-

genious contrivances, the fertile resources, the unerring calculations, the cleverly-arranged results.

His first move was to take all the annoying and fatiguing part to himself, only light and easy work was left to her. The burden that had so wearied her, the heavy responsibility, the dread of failure, the agonising thought of Claud left to die alone and unaided was lifted from her mind. She began to feel an inexpressible comfort in Chevelure's guidance and companionship. The root of this feeling was a conviction that Claud's case was in more vigorous hands than her own, his chances of escape had increased tenfold.

"Had I known it earlier," she said thoughtfully, her soft cheek leaning upon her hand, "I might have done better. There is so little time now. I suppose, monsieur, you could not find any means of telling me?" glancing timidly at Chevelure.

"Mademoiselle, my earnest wish and effort was to tell you, hoping that your knowledge of the language, and country, and influence with the people might assist the efforts I was making in my poor friend's behalf. I knew that your noble heart would respond at the first word. But the difficulty was to do it without compromising yourself. I tried many times. Twice I have been within a few yards of you as you walked in the garden at dusk. Each time I was interrupted."

"Holy Mary!" she exclaimed, "the black figure, could it have been you, monsieur?"

"Myself and no other," he replied. "The first time I saw you alone. I followed you almost to the house believing the garden empty. Just as I reached you I was startled by an exclamation very close to me. For myself I cared nothing; but I feared the consequences of discovery for you; I retreated and lost my chance. The second time I waited patiently in my hiding place, for you were not alone. You left the garden with your companions and I prepared to follow, determined, if I waited till daylight, to get speech of you; but as I stood up you turned and saw me, and cried out, and one of your friends ran back and searched all round my lair; I had only just time to conceal myself."

"And it was you," she gasped, "the black, tall figure; but, monsieur, where could you be concealed? Messere Giacomo searched everywhere, every spot of ground near the lake."

"But he did not search in the lake itself," said Chevelure smiling, "and I was there, in the water."

"In the water?" Nina's eyes expressed her astonishment.

"Yes," he said, smiling still more. "I afterwards heard—for I had scouts and reporters in every direction—that I was taken

for an animated statue. I am not surprised, for having well reconnoitred the house and grounds, I decided that the only concealment for me was in the water. I provided myself accordingly with a suit of waterproof clothing, not however as efficient as I supposed it to be. In the dusk of the evening, covered with a large cloak and slouched hat, I scaled a low wall, crept among the bushes, reached the lake, waded in, only leaving my head above water, and waited the chance of seeing you. I believe I should have accomplished my design, mademoiselle, but for the fear of alarming you. I delayed, hoping a better opportunity, and so lost it altogether."

"Then when Giacomo was hunting round the lake," — began Nina.

"I was in it, and close to him the whole time," said Chevelure. "And after that, mademoiselle, I waited and watched, creeping about the garden, and round the house till nearly morning. I knew your chamber, and venturing within sight of it now and then, saw a light burning, but of course could not hazard any sign of recognition."

"And you remained all night in the garden?" said Nina.

She had turned ashy pale. That awful night! Could she ever forget it?

"All night," he replied, "for some vague expectation of—I know not what—chained me there. I thought I would remain as long

as the light burned ; I seemed still to hope while that was unextinguished. And it was a sort of companionship too. I knew you must be sleeping, and yet I half fancied—but never mind my fancies. I did no good, yet I lingered on. I felt no fatigue ; my spirits were more buoyant than they had been for a long time.”

He paused a moment, then added fearlessly—

“Nina ! you know what kept me there. It was the happiness of being near you.”

She attempted no answer, neither assent nor denial. She could not battle with the dauntless strength of those brown eyes. She stifled her recollections sufficiently at last to say—

“That was the night I received Father Francesco’s letter. I remained up late, reading and thinking over it. Otherwise there would have been no light.”

“But surely,” he said, looking at her anxiously, “you were not up all that time. The light was still burning when I left.”

“When was that ?” she asked quickly.

“When the angelus rang from the church close by,” he answered.

Nina said no more. Such terrible remembrances crowded into her mind, and choked her voice. She grew paler and paler, and at last sank down, cold and trembling, on a

seat; for during the latter part of this conversation, both had been standing.

"Great Heaven, you are ill!" exclaimed Chevelure, "what can I do?"

"Nothing," she put out her hand to stop him. "I am tired, nothing more. Did you know, monsieur," abruptly returning to the subject, "that it was All Holy Eve that night?"

"I heard it was some festival," he said indifferently, "but am not sure that I knew what. But," watching her speaking face, "is there anything peculiar about that one?"

"It is said," she answered in a low tone, "that evil spirits haunt the earth that night."

"Indeed?" he answered rather lightly. "I saw none; and when are they supposed to leave us to ourselves?"

"When the angelus rings," she said in a whisper.

Chevelure laughed.

"I am afraid I was in bad company all the night then," he said, "and the fiends and I must have left together. I had seen for some time that my presence there was useless, yet I still lingered; but when I heard that bell I knew my time was up. I had to travel some distance before daylight."

"Yes," repeated Nina, white and shuddering, "they must go when the angelus rings. *Their* time is up, and *they* must travel before

morning, to regions where daylight never comes ! ”

Something so very curious in her manner struck Chevelure with an unpleasant feeling.

“ Nina, my beautiful Nina, surely you do not take me for one ? ”

He smiled as he spoke, and yet looked uncomfortable.

“ You ? Oh no, signor. The good spirits are abroad too ; if either, you must be one of them.”

But though this was an unmistakable expression of strong approval, Nina’s face never brightened, her large melancholy eyes, fixed on space, never turned towards her companion. But no matter, she had said it. And in the joy of the moment, he took her two hands in his own, and kissed them more than once.

The action roused her, though she scarcely seemed to notice it. She looked hurriedly about her, appeared absent and confused, and when a little timepiece close by struck an hour late in the day, she started violently.

“ How late ! ” she exclaimed, “ how long I have been here—too long—I must go. No signor, no,” putting up her hands as she saw Chevelure about to speak, “ I cannot and will not hear anything more. The time has been wasted already.”

“ One word only, mademoiselle, to appoint



our next meeting. We *must* meet, and soon, to complete these matters."

A few words were sufficient for the necessary arrangements, and then Nina, nervous and restless, was hurrying away without further leave-taking than a rapid *addio signor*, but Chevelure stepped before her, bending his firm soft eyes on her face.

"The most indifferent acquaintances," he said, "shake hands at parting. Am I less to you, Nina, than a casual companion, met to-day—gone to-morrow?"

She coloured deeply with vexation and self-reproach.

"I was rudely neglectful," she murmured, "forgive me monsieur; I am thinking of so many things."

She held out her hand to him. He took it.

"Now the other one," he said gently, but with peculiar distinctness.

How amazing was the power of this man's strong will. For a moment Nina struggled against it, but the brown eyes, sweet and earnest, never stirred; and without a word, she placed her other hand in his.

"Thanks, my beautiful," he whispered, releasing them in a few seconds. His words and actions vexed her, yet both were so inoffensively quiet that she knew no way of objecting. And she lay under immense obligations to this man, and in her present emer-

gency he was a tower of strength to her; and he had the wonderful faculty of arguing everything he did right. It was useless to oppose him: she could escape though, and she moved quickly to the door, and he with her.

"Let me go alone," she said, "my nurse is without there, she will see you."

It seemed to Nina that Margherita would recognise Chevelure, though in fact she had never seen him.

"And what if she does see me?" he whispered.

"She will know you for French," she replied; "it would be a great risk." And as he still stood his ground, she resumed with a momentary assumption of her old imperious manner—"I insist. Remember, if I am suspected of any dealings with the French our whole plan is ruined, and we meet no more."

Nina certainly never meant this threat in the sense in which Chevelure took it. To him it implied consent to indefinite future meetings; while to her, the simple result of the termination of their present business was a lasting farewell.

But he saw that it would not be wise to oppose her. He would have liked immensely to have walked beside her through those large rooms and down the long staircases, but he acknowledged the truth of her warning.

"It is a hard threat," he said, "and I dare not resist."

With a mute gesture of farewell, he moved to the other end of the room. With eager eyes he watched her pass through the doorway, but she left a glow of light and warmth behind her, and Chevelure sat a long hour motionless, never raising his eyes from the spot where she had disappeared.

Silent on their return home, as Margherita had described her, Nina seemed to grow more so every day. Madama enquired eagerly each evening from Margherita if they had encountered the mysterious supposed Frenchman since.

"Not that Margherita knew of." They had not been again to that house, nor had she herself ever again caught a glimpse of his face, which she averred was one not easily forgotten.

But Margherita began to be loud in her protest against these expeditions through the city.

"The streets are not quiet of late," she said. "Knots of men hang together, prepared to quarrel with the French soldiers on the least provocation; and the Frenchmen are only too ready to meet them half-way. The discontent seems ready to break into revolt any moment. As yet we have managed without trouble, but how am I to mind that child, if we should come in for a regular street broil? Madama, you must try to prevent her from going."

“Impossible,” sighed madama; “the Padrone will not interfere, and has forbidden me to do so. Only by persuading herself could I do anything; and I might as well try to move yonder mountain by persuasion as that tender child in this matter. You must take all the precautions you can, Margherita, and every day I expect Father Francesco’s return.”

But every day the accounts grew worse of the state of the city, and no Father Francesco.

The goldsmith was a changed man. In and out at unusual hours, careless of meals, up late at night, often closeted till near morning, with muffled, stealthy visitors, who went as they came—in darkness. The warehouse was neglected, and madama accidentally discovered that large sums of money were conveyed out of the business almost daily. Giacomo’s visits were short and uncertain. His face was always clouded, his manner preoccupied. Now and then he dropped hints of quitting the French service. Nina heard it, and vehemently demanded his reason.

“It is impossible,” he said, “to serve two masters. Duty and conviction call me one way, old ties and affections another. In my present position I must be false to one.”

The gloom upon him never seemed to lighten, except when he talked with Nina.

One evening, urged by his mother, and perhaps by his own fears, he remonstrated

with Nina for persisting in those erratic expeditions, attended only by an old woman, during the present excited state of the people.

"What has set them off," he said, "I cannot tell. There must be some secret agents stirring them up, for there is nothing that I can see at this moment to cause any extra discontent. But everywhere there is an inclination to riot. I entreat you, signorina, to remain within for a few days."

But Nina, turning deadly white, shook her head, and saying in an almost inaudible voice "I dare not lose a day" rose abruptly and left the room.

The next morning Giacomo did not appear, but despatched a note to his mother, stating that the city was in such a state of ferment and confusion that there would be imminent danger to anyone who ventured through the streets, especially two timid women, and bidding her, as she loved him, to leave no stone unturned to keep Nina within doors, at least for that day.

"I dare not leave my post for a moment," he added, "for I have mislaid my private key, and must not let it be known that I am absent. I almost fear the prison will be attacked."

As madama finished reading this significant missive, Nina and her nurse appeared, about to start on their daily journey. Madama

despatched Margherita on some errand to delay them for a moment, and showed Giacomo's note to Nina, adding her own arguments and entreaties. In addition to these Nina's sadly white cheeks and sunken eyes were in themselves a powerful reason for urging rest, but the winds, and the waves, and the rocks on which they beat and blew could not have been more deaf to madama's eloquence than was that fragile, gentle-looking young girl. She scarcely spoke, except to reiterate her determination, but when madama, at last desperate, ventured on something which faintly resembled a threat, Nina turned round in sudden emotion—whether of anger or any other feeling the startled old lady had not time to decide—and said —

“Will you stop me, madama, and prevent me from doing away the frightful curse which clings to me? Listen: If all the lava of Vesuvius were flowing between me and the place where I go this day I would cross it and perish in it rather than not go. No power on earth shall stop me, none who is my friend shall try. Not a word more. I am Duke Castellano's daughter.”

Pale, terrified, speechless, sat madama, and Nina turned to leave the room. At the door she paused and looked back. Then she returned with sudden swiftness, fell on her

knees beside the unhappy old lady, and clasped her arms round her, sobbing out —

“Oh, darling mother, forgive me. I am mad. I dare not stay; I must not say why. I go forward into the dark—I am giddy and confused. Good-bye, dear mother, a thousand times good-bye!”

Her voice sank into a trembling whisper.

“I am treading a dangerous path. Pray for me, mother, that I keep it safely to the end. Truest friend, kindest guardian, forgive me, love me still, think of me throughout this day, and send a blessing after me. Yet this once, good-bye!”

She kissed madama's pale lips with passionate warmth, and in a moment was gone.

Meeting Margherita outside the two passed quickly into the garden, while the goldsmith's wife, paralysed with an undefined terror, sat stiff and silent where Nina had left her. The click of the garden gate roused her. She started up, crying out —

“Is she gone? Let me see her again!”

She ran to the window, but the gate was shut—the garden was empty. The poor old lady sat down and cried bitterly.

It was a terrible anguish that called the unwonted tears from those withered eyes, and it had a cause and a meaning, though she could not define it in words, or even to

her own mind. For those blind, mysterious instincts, which speak to our inner consciousness, not to the outward organs, were whispering to madama's soul, and telling her that she had looked her last on Nina the Beautiful.



## CHAPTER V.

NIGHT came down upon Naples—night dark and starry, with falling dews, and sweet scents, and whispering winds, bringing silence to the woods and meadows, and rest to weary men, and sleep to little children; but it brought no peace to the disturbed city. Throughout the day the tumult had increased immensely, but as the only result was a mass of people and confusion of voices, the authorities had given it little attention.

BUT as evening drew on it seemed to assume a more definite shape. The streets were almost impassable, and the crowd surged so violently in the direction of Strada Prigione that some messengers who were proceeding from the prison found it impossible to make their way to the point they wished, and were forced to return.

These messengers had been despatched by Giacomo to the General commanding, stating that he feared mischief was brewing; hinting the possibility of the prison being attacked, and begging that a detachment, or even a whole regiment, might be sent down to reinforce his very slender garrison. Not that he feared the possibility of the prison being

taken—unarmed and undisciplined men in however large numbers could not effect that; but he *did* fear that in the confusion incidental to a tumult of any kind it would be impossible to keep the strict watch over the prisoners that was absolutely necessary, and they might without much trouble escape.

But it seemed as if the adverse crowd knew the mission these men were on; for they were surrounded, and hustled, and pinned in corners, and pushed, and knocked, and jostled, till fairly worn out, panting and fuming, they set their faces towards the prison, and then, strangely enough, made their way with perfect ease.

Late in the day, however, Giacomo did contrive to get his wishes conveyed to head-quarters, and then it was almost useless. It happened that a great festa was going on at a village some miles distant, and numbers of the French soldiers had obtained leave till late in the evening, and departed early in the day; for with such contempt did the French authorities regard the natives, that though the streets had been disturbed for a week past, they had not considered it necessary to take any precautions. The best regiment in the city, formerly Chevelure's, was for the moment but a name, for every man who could be spared from necessary duty had taken his

departure to the scene of festivity, and, therefore, when Giacomo's messages arrived, what with the necessity of consultation, the obstruction in the streets, and the reduced state of the garrison, it was impossible at the moment to comply with his request. But the General sent him word that directly any force could be collected it should be placed at his disposal, at the same time giving him full authority to take any measures he pleased for the safety of the prison, promising that if an escape was effected in the confusion he should be held blameless.

Giacomo's talent for military tactics, as also his unflinching probity, were well known, and the General felt sure that even with a handful of men in a strongly-fortified building like the prison, he would be able to withstand the utmost that a Neapolitan mob could do.

"And even if any of the prisoners *did* escape," muttered the old officer, walking slowly up and down, after despatching his answer to Giacomo, "I don't think it would much signify. There is no one there of any consequence. A few harmless lunatics who think their simple protest will prevent the Emperor from reigning. The poor wretches are too far gone in their madness to give in, but once safe out of

our clutches I don't think they will venture to brave us again. And a good riddance to us; I don't know what we could do with them. One can scarcely blame the unhappy creatures for sticking to their own cause, yet examples must be made. Truly I wish that they would all escape: the very best thing that could happen both to them and us."

"You forget, General," said a cat-like voice at the other end of the room, "that Captain de Meronne is confined in that prison."

The General started.

"Since his condemnation, you know," resumed the voice. "It is unfortunate, and strikes me as peculiar, this unusual disturbance to-night. To-morrow would have mattered little, for to-morrow all would be safe."

"Is to-morrow the day?" said the General in a changed voice, turning abruptly on his Secretary. "I had forgotten, is it indeed so near?"

"To-morrow is the day," replied the other, carefully avoiding the old man's eye, "to-morrow at sunrise."

There was a long silence, broken only by the noise of the Secretary's pen and the rustling of paper.

"La Serpe," said the General at last, stop-

ping his walk before the writing table, "I have been thinking over that matter a great deal of late; some few circumstances made me feel uneasy; I went through it all from beginning to end, studying the whole affair, and the result has been that I would give anything I possess to undo the work of the last few months."

"General!" exclaimed the scribe aghast.

"Yes," the General went on, "anything to see undone what now it is too late to undo. I would that I had never meddled in it. I have thought over it long and carefully, and I sometimes fear we have condemned an innocent man."

"But, General, the evidence, the proofs"—

"Proofs? Of what? That he assisted the girl to escape? True. But the more I reflect upon it the more sure I feel that the connection between them was simply some love affair. The girl I remember was most beautiful. How was it that that idea which struck me at the first moment completely died out of my mind? I don't know what possessed me. And he positively dies to-morrow?"

"To-morrow at sunrise," replied the Secretary with set teeth.

"Too late to do anything—too late now," said the General with half a groan, and he resumed his walk up and down the room.

But as he walked he muttered and murmured to himself —

“Poor Claud! A brave soldier, a good officer, and as like my boy Victor as his twin brother. It was pleasant to see his merry young face and hear his cheery laugh. It was like my boy come back to me. I have had but a lonely time of late. To-morrow—positively to-morrow! Good Heaven! it seems impossible.”

The Secretary bit his lips with rage as he listened to these broken ejaculations, and congratulated himself that matters were now fortunately beyond recall. But a gnawing fear that the Governor of the prison might have some real cause of alarm, urged him at last to break in on the General's reverie and ask if he had not better send some orders to the different regiments for the detachments required.

“No,” responded the General sharply, “quite useless. The riot would be over before they could get there. And I see no necessity. The Governor was right to send. It exonerates himself in case of accident; but 'tis only a form. No; let things take their course. The prison is safe enough.”

After a moment's thought he resumed—

“I don't think there is anything more to attend to. Should there be any communi-

cation of importance let me know," and he stalked moodily from the room.

The Secretary gnashed his teeth when left alone, comforting himself, however, with his chief's mournful reflection that it was indeed too late; but he would have been terribly startled could he have looked into the old man's heart and seen the thought that nestled there, and every now and then found a whispered vent at his lips.

"If I should hear to-morrow," so the thought was framed, "that Claud had escaped, it would be the best news that has greeted me for many a year."

And so it fell out that no reinforcements were sent to the prison; and the time went on, and the tumult grew greater, and the mob had it all their own way.

The confusion was terrible. The police, that is the body so termed in the present day, tried apparently with zeal to restore order and disperse the crowds, but without the slightest effect. Broken in one spot they re-formed in another. Some military had been sent out, not to defend the prison but to try and clear the streets, but even they were powerless. It had been reported to the authorities that for some days past printed papers had been in circulation, setting forth the various iniquities of the French Government, and especially the fact that one of

their own nation, a Royalist, had been condemned to death for assisting an Italian lady of rank when in extreme peril, and calling upon all true Italians to prevent this crime from being perpetrated. But not one of these papers had ever fallen into the hands of the French, though their spies and reporters had sworn to having seen them; neither could it be discovered by whom they were printed, where obtained, how issued, or indeed anything concerning them, except the fact of their existence. Nevertheless it was true, and this had roused the fury of the Neapolitans almost to madness. It was putting them under a more degrading yoke than ever, to make compassion to them a capital crime; and every lazzarone in the city joined the ever-increasing crowd, calling on his patron Saint, and vowing vengeance against the tyrants; and every fruit-seller, and water-carrier, and charcoal-burner for miles round, as soon as his work was over, sped on joyful feet to add his mite to the crush and clamour every moment increasing.

Alone in her lonely dwelling sat Madama Capri throughout that dreary day. It is no exaggeration to say that never since she first opened her eyes on this troublesome world had she passed a day so dreadful. Nina's mysterious and terrifying words at parting



almost fell into the background, as newer and more imminent causes of alarm sprang up.

The Piazza d'Oro was not in the least a thoroughfare. Though so close to the Toledo it was in a manner isolated, for it led nowhere in particular. Formerly, when the different crafts appropriated to themselves different streets of the city, it had been, as its unchanged name implied, the mart of all the jewellery and gold work in Naples ; and many of the artificers, though obliged for the convenience of trade to remove their business to a more central situation, still retained their private residence there. It was very quiet, and though so close to the principal street, the sounds from the city seldom reached it ; therefore, when the smothered roar, which always accompanies a vast concourse of people, began to penetrate to the Capri dwelling, interrupted occasionally by shouts and yells, madama's heart, heavy enough already, sank lower and lower, till she well-nigh fainted with terror.

Leaving the rooms that overlooked the garden, she hastened to the other side of the house, and there saw with consternation even the quiet Piazza filled with a motley crowd, with lowering faces, and flashing eyes, chattering and gesticulating with unmistakable signs of fury and desperation.

All were hurrying towards the Toledo. Madama sank on a seat beside the window where she had stationed herself, and covered her eyes with her hands.

"My child, my darling, where is she?" was her first thought. Then she started up. Something must be done. But what? Who could she consult? The goldsmith had departed before daylight, on some secret mission, leaving word that he might not return for twenty-four hours. Giacomo, there was her second agony. He had spoken of the possibility of the prison being attacked, and from what she saw, it seemed more than likely.

"And this infuriated crowd," she sobbed. "Oh, Holy Saints! They will tear him limb from limb."

Almost crazed with terror, she went down, summoned Caterina, and bade her despatch an errand boy into the Toledo, to discover if possible what was going on. The boy, sharp-witted like most of his class, soon returned. He had found out as much as the rioters themselves knew. They meant to demand the release of the State prisoners, and failing that, attack the prison.

"But they'll do no harm, signora," said this precocious young inspector of fortifications, "*they'll* not get in; why I've tried it myself over and over, and never could.

There's always a soldier, or a man with a bunch of keys, coming across you at every turn. Besides, Messere Giacomo is there, and he won't *let* them get in."

But madama knew better than her young scout, the danger of such a riot—revolt rather, as the present; and was not unreasonably terrified at the idea that Giacomo, supposed to be in the French interest, as he undoubtedly was, would, if the attack succeeded, find no mercy at the hands of the furious populace, exasperated to madness against their foreign rulers. She administered to herself such small scraps of consolation as could be extracted from the knowledge that the prison was almost impregnable; that Giacomo understood the science of attack and defence as well as any general officer in the French army; that forewarned was forearmed, and a regiment of French Lancers would soon clear the streets from one end of the city to the other; and then her thoughts reverted again to Nina, and how she would fare in such a riotous state of things.

"What *can* it be, what *can* it be?" exclaimed the goldsmith's wife, "that forces her into such peril as this? Oh, if the Padrone were only at home. And where can he have gone to? Away twenty-four hours! He has not been a day from home

since we were married. I live among mysteries. Oh, Nina, my darling, only come back safe to me, and Father Francesco himself shall not make me ever lose sight of you again!"

And madama watched and waited, pacing from one window to another, with a white, scared face; listening with her heart at her mouth to every sound below, hoping that the desperate state of the city might drive her darling back to shelter, all through that endless day that seemed an eternity of terror: but Nina did not return!

And the crowd multiplied, and the roar deepened, and the shouts and yells grew louder and more frequent, and the brisk little messenger, accompanied now by the head man of the establishment, ventured out again and again; but they returned each time with graver faces and more troubled demeanour, and at last refused to make any further effort.

"For," said the stalwart Pietro, a fine specimen of Calabrian growth, "only by clinging to a pillar, could I keep my feet at all; and as for this little fellow," pointing to the boy, whose brown face blanched to a dull grey, and wonderfully silent tongue showed the terror and struggle he had gone through, "he would have been crushed to a mummy before now, if I hadn't held him in

my arms, and stuck myself in a corner with my back to the wall. Indeed, signora, we must not risk it again. Even strong men have been knocked down and trodden under foot; and as for women and children, 'twould be simply death for them to pass through the streets now."

"Oh, Nina, my child," gasped madama in despair, "what will become of you?"

But the hours went on, the dreadful day drew towards its close, the twilight gathered, the night fell, and Nina did not return!

And now it was quite dark, and the tumult was at its height. The moon, just past the full, had not yet risen, and in the dusky twilight, friends and strangers were mingled together in a chaos of confusion.

A dense crowd filled Strada Prigione, and heaved, and tossed, and shouted in front of the massive prison doors.

Since darkness set in a new element had been added to the moving mass, by the arrival in groups of two or three of a number of tall, muscular men, dressed in the costume of various ranks and trades of the peasantry, yet looking somehow different to others of their class.

Some of the more observing and less vociferous of the mob, now and then made remarks to each other concerning these new comers, and wondered a little who they could

be. By degrees a whisper was set afloat, which, like all other whispers, increased in importance as it went on.

"Calabrians," it commenced. "Calabrians just landed." "Calabrians from the Duke's army." "The Duke has landed." "The Duke is coming to help us." "The Duke is marching on Naples." "The Duke is close to the city gates." "Before long we shall hear the Duke's bugles in the town," and so on through an indefinite number of shapes till the whole crowd was leavened with this idea, and standing on the tip-toe of expectation.

But all efforts to extract news from the supposed Calabrians, or even engaged them in conversation proved ineffectual.

They appeared to have taken a vow of silence, for though signs were seen to pass between them, they were never heard to speak to each other.

By degrees these groups gathered together in a body, and seemed to place themselves under the directions of two men, a short and a tall one, who were evidently accustomed to command. Instinctively following the example of those who it was plain knew what they were about, the mass of Neapolitans hung upon the heels of these men, and imitated all they did.

The intention of the leaders was ap-

parently to effect an entrance at the great gates of the prison; tactics which seemed incomprehensible, for there were other smaller, and much weaker entrances, and less securely guarded; and Giacomo from his post of observation, noticing this, concluded either that they were ignorant of the existence of these other entrances, or did not understand the proper mode of attacking a fortified building.

Yet he congratulated himself on this ignorance, whether natural or scientific; for it enabled him to concentrate all his small defensive force upon that one point.

The whole body at his command was but a handful of men, for it consisted only of the guard which mounted there every morning, to keep the gates and supply sentries for important prisoners, and the warders.

These latter were mostly Neapolitans, and not conspicuous for bravery, but they would do to stand behind the French soldiers, and, if necessary, fire on the crowd below.

All day long had Giacomo watched the proceedings in the street with a practised eye. That the tide was flowing towards the prison he saw plainly, and wondered why it should be, for, he argued, there was no Neapolitan of any note in the prison at present, and none likely to excite either the interest or indignation of the people.

"Some mistaken idea they have got into their heads," he thought, while overlooking the preparations for defence which he had found it necessary to make, though really apprehending no danger. But as the day wore on, and the riot increased instead of diminishing, he felt not quite so much at ease. At last he sent those messengers, most of whom were driven back, and when eventually he received through the successful channel the answer already described, he merely shrugged his shoulders saying, "Very good, then we must take care of ourselves," and set about doing the best that lay in his power.

After arranging matters with a view to making everything do its utmost in the way of defence, he went again to reconnoitre; and now through the twilight, rapidly merging into night, he first noticed the tall, stalwart men moving in small groups, and gradually with disciplined precision uniting themselves in one.

Giacomo looked again and again, rubbed his eyes, peered through a night-glass, and then with intense interest lighting up his face, concentrated all his observation on these figures. He noticed the two leaders, detected the signs that appeared to pass between them and their men, directed a searching glance all round, and his skilful eye picking out



these men among their surroundings, he saw precisely where each party was stationed, divined the manoeuvre they were about to execute, and without waiting another moment descended and gave the astounding order, to take off every sentry and every warder, to mass them all close to the gate, to collect all the arms and ammunition and place it in readiness, and not a man to stir from his post.

"Before an hour is over," he concluded, "there will be such an attack on the gate as will take every pair of hands we have to repulse."

"But, Capitano," said the Lieutenant, "what can they do, these rioters? They don't know how to fight."

"I think you will find," said Giacomo coolly, "that they *do* know how to fight, and mean to put their knowledge into practice."

"But," returned the other, "you don't think the prison can be taken? Why, it would require artillery."

"True," replied Giacomo, "but it will be attacked, and there are some determined men outside who will not stop at trifles, and a raging, furious mob, ready to back them in everything."

"But what men?" said the bewildered Lieutenant. "Lazzaroni, fruit-sellers, shop-boys; do you call those determined men?"

"Listen," said Giacomo; "the men I speak of" — he whispered the rest into his companion's ear.

"Eh! what?" exclaimed the startled subaltern, "you don't say so? How do they come here? What makes you think it?"

The Governor slightly elevated his eyebrows.

"I say it because it's the case. I don't think it, I know it; I've seen them. What brings them here, I can partly guess. But remember, this between you and me. Not a word to the men. All I say openly is, the mob will fight and we must resist them."

"Then you think it possible they may effect an entrance?" said the Lieutenant, in a subdued tone.

"Possible—yes; if the attack is obstinate, and no succour arrives. But it will be a bad look out for the garrison if they do. The furious mob will butcher every Frenchman they find, and we, my good friend, will go along with them."

The Lieutenant turned a shade paler.

"But the men you speak of," he said. "surely they would not allow" —

"Not if they can help it," interrupted Giacomo, "but, can they? They are half-a-dozen to as many hundreds. I don't understand it," he continued, knitting his brows, "there is something underneath this. They

know the danger of such a measure; surely they would never venture it. However, our plan is defence, whatever happens. So see these things got ready, while I look again at affairs outside."

And Giacomo returned to the watch-tower over the gate, with a weight on his spirits which he could not account for.

"I have no belief in presentiments," he muttered, "yet I cannot shake off the feeling of coming doom. Those yelling fools have nothing to do with it. I felt no heaviness of heart when we charged the enemies' guns at Marengo; I was blithe enough, though courting death in every shape, when we chased the Turks under the hot sun of Egypt. What ails me now?"

He reached the tower, looked down on the surging crowd below, but could distinguish nothing beyond a moving mass, busy apparently over something at a distance; but what, he could not as yet distinguish.

"Nina, Nina," he murmured, "why have my thoughts run so wildly upon her all this day? Not thoughts only, terrors and agonies that I never felt before. Surely"—with a start—"no danger threatens her! Surely, she never ventured! impossible, folly!—am I turning lunatic that I dream of such horrors? Beyond doubt, she is safe at home, and the very moment this most vexatious farce

is over my own eyesight shall convince me of her well-being. And now to business."

He resumed his scrutiny of the incomprehensible besiegers, but, puzzled with what he saw, called up at last the Sergeant of the Guard.

This man had served in the wars of Louis the Sixteenth, then in the revolutionary armies, and finally attaching himself to Buonaparte, had followed him devotedly through his first brilliant Italian campaign up to the present day, yet still was only a sergeant, the reason being his utter incapacity for command; yet shrewd by nature, and of such varied knowledge in military matters that his opinion was well worth the having.

"Look at those men, Sergeant," said Giacomo, "and tell me what you make of them."

The Sergeant peered through the darkness, now on this side, now that.

"Monsieur le Capitaine, I make that they are fools."

"Indeed!" said Giacomo; "how so?"

"How so? Oh, my brave Captain, do you ask me how so, you who can manœuvre a regiment as well as the Emperor himself: you who know what weight of artillery it will take to bring down every fortification in Europe? See you not what they are doing,

the bare-footed maniacs ? They are going to beat down the prison walls with sticks, little sticks, such as I would use to punish my dog. Oh ! then, is it not very good, and shall I not call them fools ? ”

And the old soldier laughed long and heartily.

“ My good Sergeant, the sticks are not so very little ; they are stout, serviceable bludgeons, and let me tell you those men are not fools. I wish I knew as much of their intentions as I do of their capabilities. Were they the bare-footed maniacs you take them for, I could afford to laugh at them ; but, being what they are, I know that they must have a plan hidden under this absurd attempt. Bludgeons, however strong, won’t beat down the prison doors, and that these men know. Look again, Sergeant ; watch them well. Not the shouting mob, the men moving in small parties, tall, strong men. Well, what say you now ? ”

“ By my faith, Captain, you are right ; I had not noticed those little parties. Now I see ; now I comprehend. Bravo ! Well done ! ”

For, by a skilful movement, a dozen of these small parties wheeled into one, and so doing brought themselves in a compact mass up to the very gates of the prison.

"But, Governor, these men know how to fight; these men are soldiers."

"Soldiers?" said Giacomo quietly. "I believe you there. Know how to fight? Well, they ought to. They had good practice at Austerlitz and elsewhere. Say nothing," he continued, stopping the astonished Sergeant before he could speak. The Lieutenant knows, and you, and I, none other. We must keep this to ourselves. The question is, what are they doing?"

"A feigned attack I take it," said the puzzled soldier; "but for what?"

"My own idea," responded Giacomo, "and I too say, for what? What have *they* to do with the anger of the people?"

"I'm not so sure that it is feigned after all," said the Sergeant, still watching the proceedings below. "At any rate they mean work, whatever the work may be."

"Our only plan," said Giacomo, "is to keep a strict watch upon them. I have brought every man the prison contains down to the gate. We must be ready, whatever happens, though what they meditate is beyond me. Now, let us go down again."

"I thought I understood most dodges," said the veteran, as they descended the winding staircase, "but this beats me. If it were only those shouting beggars, no

wonder, but these men—well, I'll keep a sharp eye on them any way."

So adroitly had the movements of these small parties been managed, that by this time nearly all of them had contrived to work their way up to the gate.

The two leaders were now together, and, apparently satisfied with the result of their exertions, were leaning against the wall in a sheltered niche formed by two buttresses, and talking in cautious whispers.

"So far well," said the taller. "We need do nothing more till the moon rises. A little shouting and scuffling will fill up the interval till then. But I am anxious, how anxious I can scarcely say."

"Yes," said the other in cheerful tones, "it's a trying time. But we'll do it, no fear. What hot work this is! Really I can't stand it any longer. No one can see us here. I must breathe the air a moment."

Both these men were masked. The shorter, as he spoke, removed the mask, and, after a moment's hesitation, his companion did the same. It was a strange revelation; Chevelure and Brandenburg leading an infuriated Neapolitan mob against their own people, and their own fortress.

"What a nice picture we should make at this moment for that precious scoundrel," chuckled Brandenburg. "Can't I fancy that

I see his eyes gleaming in the dark like a wild cat? He'd better not try a spring at me though; I'd wring his neck as soon as look at him."

"You'll not have the chance," said Chevelure, with as close an approach to a sneer as his lofty contempt for the subject discussed permitted. "He knows too well to put himself in competition with men, men with free limbs, strong hands, and honest hearts. Women, children, and captives are his favourite morsels. I think our business to-night will deal him a blow he little expects."

"I hope so," rejoined Brandenburg; "and that sweet little thing, what of her? All right?"

"Undoubtedly," said Chevelure, with the slightest possible stiffness. "I told you what wrong conclusions we had jumped at. Never was a greater mistake."

"Just so," replied Brandenburg gravely, but with a twinkle in his eye. "That was certainly a night of mistakes. In the first place I think it was an amiable, but unfortunate mistake, for that pretty creature to have come there at all; then it was an idiotic mistake for the General to fancy her a spy, and an insulting mistake for that beast to think that we were going to sit still and see her shot. It appears that some



conclusions that I myself came to were mistaken ones, and as for poor Claud, he was a living blunder from the beginning of the business to the end. In fact you, my good friend, were the only wise man among us. I hope, for the credit of France, that your reputation will live; I hope that no untoward circumstances will happen proving that we were *all* blind moles."

"What circumstances?" said Chevelure quickly. What *could* happen?"

"Oh, nothing, I don't know, only in this queer world one must be prepared for everything, even to acknowledging one's pet belief a mistake."

"I don't see," began Chevelure, "how I could be mistaken, for everything I predicted has come right as yet, and for the future I have not ventured to say" —

"My best Chevelure," interrupted Brandenburg, "you are a marvel of knowledge, only if you ever *should* find yourself mistaken, be consoled with the thought of how many have been so before. Now, don't you think we had better set to work again, for the time is getting on, and I fancy I see a little glow in the sky yonder."

"True," said Chevelure, turning and looking in the direction he pointed out, "we must begin in earnest now. The moon will be up before long, and then for a final

struggle. We shall go at them, virtually, if not actually, with the old French war-cry 'St. Denis for the Lily, and down with all traitors.'"

"Upon my word, Chevelure," solemnly remarked Brandenburg, "you are coming out as a *preux chevalier* pretty strong. One would think, to hear you talk, that the days of chivalry, crusades, and plate armour were come to life again."

"Have they ever died?" said Chevelure quietly.

"Ever died? What a question! Pray do you and I wear steel coats?"

"I grant you the armour," laughed Chevelure, "but as for the other two they will live as long as the earth contains a wrong to be redressed, or a man who will sacrifice himself to redress it. The great crusade is going on still, my good Brandenburg; and you and I are at this moment running a tilt against all Mahometry embodied in that most execrable villain. He has caused, we know what, of anxiety and anguish for the last few months. I hope to-night's work will teach him, that Satan his master, is not quite dominant on the earth yet."

"Amen to that," piously responded Brandenburg.

"But see," exclaimed Chevelure, "you are right, the moon is rising, now for it, heart and soul!"

They replaced their masks, mingled in the crowd, joined their own men still engaged in the apparently hopeless attempt to force the prison doors with clubs, and surrounded by all the yelling lazzaroni, who did nothing but shout and gesticulate. As the two threw themselves to the front Brandenburg heard Chevelure say softly to himself "St. Denis for the Lily," and the next moment a blow, as from a battering ram, shook the heavy gates; and Brandenburg smiled.

In less than ten minutes such a shower of strokes had fallen upon the iron clampings that Giacomo and his subordinates began to have serious fears as to the ultimate safety of the prison, unless help should arrive, though still mystified as to why that mode of attack was chosen instead of a more effectual one.

"It strikes me," whispered the Sergeant in Giacomo's ear, "'tis to screen their own trade. Better management might betray them. This is the only sort of warfare that those half-naked, screeching demons know of; and these men want to be taken for that sort, d'ye see? But what brings them here at all is my marvel."

"Possibly," said Giacomo, after a moment's hesitation, "to release some of the prisoners. You know we have French as well as Italians."

"Ah!" said the veteran, stroking his grey moustache, "I didn't think of that. Possibly, yes, but, by Jupiter, we musn't let them. First place, 'tis against discipline," drawing himself up with military precision, "be the imprisonment ever so wrongful. And, secondly, while they are releasing their friends the thousand or two savages out there will manage to beat us down by sheer force of numbers. I don't mind a dozen or two to my own hand, but after that one's sword-arm gets weary; killing is hard work."

Giacomo was about to reply when such a thundering assault was made on the gate, that, hastily calling to his men to collect themselves and stand firm, he gave orders to fortify all the weaker points with every sort of bulwark that could be obtained.

He posted a line of men as close as they could stand along the entire width of the gate, and behind them another.

"If a breach is made in the woodwork," he said, "the man nearest put the muzzle of his musket to it and fire, then move away, and the next take his place, and so on all through the double line. Remember, if they enter you are all dead men. If, in spite of all, the breach enlarge, stand close with bayonets levelled, they will scarcely rush on them, and any moment help may arrive."

Some of the men wondered that the

Captain did not give orders to fire at once ; convenient loopholes were at hand, and nothing would check them so much. But Giacomo was averse to this. Firstly, for the sake of humanity. A volley into that closely packed crowd would have carried almost certain death with every bullet, and he knew that no common rioters, but brave and worthy men were there, engaged most likely in a righteous cause. Nor did he wish to fire on his poor, ignorant, exasperated countrymen ; moreover, every moment he expected help ; the serious nature of the riot must be known by this time, and a dragoon regiment would soon clear the streets, most likely without bloodshed ; at any rate, the responsibility would be off his shoulders. More than all, he knew well that, however it might affect the common mob, the men he had noticed would no more mind his musketry than the peppering of a hail storm ; and, lastly, the orders of the King, and his express wishes were, that every disturbance should be quelled with as little violence as possible.

And now the tumult became something terrific. Scarcely a word could be distinguished, though shouted in the ear. The orders were given by signs. Every precaution was taken. The men stood firm. Giacomo, perfectly cool and collected, ar-

ranged, directed, altered, was here, there, and everywhere, delighting the soldierly Frenchmen, encouraging the scared Neapolitans. All the military knowledge, acquired through years of hard service, came out now.

But the assault waxed hotter and hotter, and the uproar, piercing the massive prison walls, reached the most distant and closely locked cells, and the prisoners, startled and uncertain, called again and again, and received no answer, and wondered where were their jailers, and tried to shake the unyielding doors, and paced up and down the narrow floor, and listened again, and trembled and shivered with excitement, and smiled through white lips, and hoped, and feared, and waited in an agony of expectation, and said within themselves, "Is it good or evil?"

## CHAPTER VI.

THE moon was up, and shining brightly through the window of Claud's prison. It was not a cell; at least, that term would scarcely convey its appearance. It was a tolerably-sized room, with bare stone walls, and common and scanty furniture, but not altogether comfortless. The window was large, though thickly barred, and by perching on a projecting stone, and holding on by the bars, the prisoner could see plainly into the street below. Beyond that, the entrance of the harbour and part of the harbour itself; and farther out still, the shining sea, dancing now in the moonlight, and seeming to beckon to the weary captive, and say, "Come to me and be free."

"Ah! if I could," sighed Claud, turning away for the hundredth time from the enticing prospect. "But it matters little now. By this time to-morrow, long before, I shall be freer than the moonlight itself; free to go and to come. But where? Shall I indeed be free to go and come? Shall I wander mournfully on the earth, and watch those I can no longer approach? Shall I be able to warn, and protect, and preserve them from evil? Or must I stand invisible, in-

tangible, and see danger threaten and engulf them, and yet be powerless to save? The thought is agony! Such I can believe would be the tortures of the lost. No; eternal oblivion were better. But is it a choice?"

He paced up and down, trying to shake off the gloomy reflections. He was very much changed in appearance from the Claud of a few months ago. Some people, perhaps, would have thought him improved. He was pale and grave, much thinner, and somewhat hollow-eyed, and a sort of careless frivolity that formerly characterized his face was gone. Certainly frivolous thoughts had had little room in his mind for some time past.

He heard the shouting and scuffling beneath his window, but had not heeded it much. His room lay at the extreme opposite end to the gates, and the street below contained only the outskirts of the crowd; so as disturbed streets had been no uncommon matter of late, he gave it little attention.

He had come to the awful turning point of his existence. He should never see the sun set again. And in something the same manner as it is said to be with drowning men, as he watched the gold and crimson fade from the sky, and the conviction came upon him that he had taken leave of the daylight, all his life passed in review before him.

It had not been a very eventful life. The



usual number of escapes and adventures incidental to a soldier's career ; a great deal of foolishness ; a great deal of selfishness ; numberless acts, culpably thoughtless ; a large amount of wasted time, and no visible fruit of good, made up the darker side of his reflections. But, on the other hand, not one dishonourable action, not one intentional cruelty, not one mean or treacherous motive came to goad him with the despairing thought that the disembodied spirit must pass to the place it has prepared for itself, among kindred spirits of its own deliberate choosing. And even beyond this, a few noble and devoted efforts, a few holy and cherished ideas, and more than one unhesitating self-sacrifice, looked back at him with angel eyes, and took away the sting from death.

From the time of his condemnation he had never hoped much. He knew the enemy he had to deal with, how determined and unscrupulous, and the great stake for which he played.

Since his sentence not a friend had been allowed to see him, not a letter to be conveyed to or from his prison ; yet he knew as well as if a thousand tongues had repeated it daily, that Chevelure was concentrating all the energies of his mighty mind on some means of saving him ; that Brandenburg was

daring his own fate every hour in frantic efforts to destroy the web that had been woven round him; and it was a happiness to him to think so, and from his heart he thanked them, and felt all the while that it was in vain.

To Giacomo's kindness he owed the knowledge that his two friends were free; also the account of Chevelure's resignation, and every other little piece of news which the kind-hearted Governor fancied would comfort or gratify him.

When Giacomo spoke of Chevelure flinging down his broken sword before the face of that unrighteous jury, Claud's eyes lighted up with one of those flashes of truth and nobleness that had made him such a demigod to dreaming, worshipping Nina.

"How like him!" he murmured. "Chevelure all over."

Giacomo's interest in his prisoner was almost painful. He knew very little of his case beyond what Claud had himself told him, who, from circumstances, could not be very explicit; but he had heard enough to convince him that there had been infamously foul play, and that this unhappy young man was innocent. Giacomo did all he could. He gave him the most comfortable room the prison possessed, and close to his own quarters, so that if he had only five

minutes to spare he could look in and cheer the lonely prisoner with a few hopeful words. And though Claud was forbidden the use of pen and paper, it soon became understood between them that any communication he wished made to any especial friend—on indifferent matters, of course—he had only to state the substance to the Governor, and, strangely enough, the friend in question became possessed of that information. By the same inexplicable means were communications made to the unfortunate condemned, and a thousand other small kindnesses; and more than all, the comforting knowledge that an honest, true-hearted man was always at hand, lightened many a weary hour to the hapless prisoner.

And Giacomo tried still more, but could not succeed. So many unfortunate circumstances were mixed up in Claud's case that the latter scarcely dared mention a name or a fact for fear of compromising someone. There was Nina to be considered, and she was the root of it all. Her secret must be kept at any risk. "I have done her harm enough by my selfishness without that," he thought. So even if Giacomo had had the power to aid him effectually, his ignorance of all but the simplest facts would have rendered it useless. But he had done his utmost, and the evening that Nina had re-

marked his trouble in the garden had seen the failure of a little plan that he had laid with much care and labour for his imprisoned friend's benefit.

And now the last day had come, and no reprieve, or chance, or hope of one. Of all Claud's melancholy reflections through these, the last hours of his life, perhaps the bitterest was, that when Nina came to know his fate, she must also know that he left a wife behind him. Ignorant of the date and circumstances of his marriage, what would she not think of him ?

It was no disloyalty to his own wife that caused this anxiety. Surprise, curiosity, admiration, and gratified vanity had been the principal ingredients in his momentary infatuation for Nina ; the romance of their first meeting, and the mystery that surrounded her, adding to the false sentiment, till raised to a sense of its hollowness by the sudden re-awaking of the real and genuine feeling which had only slept while he believed it dead. And then he tried to undo the mischief he had done, clumsily and badly, because he would not do it thoroughly. He would not face the unpleasant duty, so he shirked it, and he felt now with a bitter pang, that he would stand accused of deliberate falsehood and base treachery. "If he had only had courage to speak before!"

But his horror of pain made him a coward. He could not bear to distress either her or himself, and he knew that the anguish she would feel would be reflected on him.

"Too late now!" he sighed. "I must only hope that after the first agony, for it *will* be agony, she will despise and forget me!"

He tried to devote his last thoughts to the unhappy young wife never seen since their hands were joined at the altar, who tomorrow would be a desolate widow, surrounded by spies and enemies.

"Chevelure will be all to her that friend or brother can be," he groaned; "but even he may not be able to match the subtilty of that fiend."

Meantime the dim and clash in the street became louder and louder. The mob, rushing backwards and forwards in every direction, shouted as only a Neapolitan mob *can* shout; and Claud, roused at last to the fact that this was more than an ordinary street row, climbed up to the window, and listening attentively, heard the name of Castellano repeated several times in tones of triumph.

"What can it mean?" he thought. "Can he have won any advantage? Is he in arms again?"

And memory moving in a natural direction went back to the last time that he had heard

that name associated with war and clamour—the night of Nina's condemnation and escape. He could not but think it all over again. The disjointed tale that Brandenburg had told; the General's consequent revelation; the dreadful cry; the apparent spectre; the horrible consummation of the night's work, and the train of unhappy events that had followed, ending up with his own presence in that prison, and the abrupt closing of the fatal record at sunrise next morning.

He sat down and leaned his head on his hand, weird ideas floating through his mind.

"Had it had been the spectre in deed and truth," he thought, "the old man's prophetic warnings could not have been more perfectly fulfilled. For certainly a madness of one kind or another took possession of us all that night, and a deadly vengeance seems to have dogged us ever since. Well, to-morrow I hope will end it. I am the faulty one, and if I thought my sacrifice would be sufficient, and the innocent and helpless would suffer nothing, I could leave the regions of daylight almost without regret, for of late life has been to me but a weary matter."

With his hand over his eyes, shutting out the actual present, memory brought up old faces, old scenes, old recollections, more

tender and clinging because soon to pass into black forgetfulness for ever.

"I should have liked to shake hands with Chevelure and Brandenburg once more," he muttered; "better, perhaps, as it is. May all that is good in Heaven and earth stand by them as they have stood by me! Their own hearts will be a better testimony to them than any words of mine."

From a secret pocket he took the little cross given him by the herbalist during his search for Nina.

"What to do with this," he said musingly. "I scarcely know why I have kept it so long. I don't fancy to throw it away, yet I would rather it were not found."

He began to think over the circumstances under which he had received it.

"What did that strange old man mean I wonder! What was the danger he warned me against? Certainly not without reason, for misfortune has attended me from that moment to this. Is there a curse in that girl's dark bewildering eyes, that trouble seems to seize everyone who comes under their influence? Tehre is Chevelure—wise, impenetrable Chevelure—wasting his heart upon a shadow. I know the look in his face when he speaks of her."

Then another train of ideas set in upon him.

"And Brandenburg says she is the image of that terrible picture. In the same dress, too—strange coincidence! I feel, though the fault is my own, that she has been fatal to me; and whatever miraculous powers this may possess"—looking at the cross—"they have not been exercised for my benefit. There, let it go; what use is it?"

He tossed it impatiently on the table, and walked once or twice up and down the room, stopped again, and looked at it earnestly.

"What is the charm?" he thought. "At sight of it I have seen dying men smile through their agonies. They believed the tale of the Nazarene, and if it were true"—

In thought alone was this sentence finished, but he took up the cross and restored it to its original resting place.

"It shall stay with me to the last," he said. "I have no belief in it as a talisman, but possibly it may have a magic of its own above and beyond all the sorcery by which the powers of evil have ever tempted and destroyed mankind. The days of miracles are over, and nothing short of a miracle could aid me now."

He sat down again, threw his arms on the table, laid his head upon them, and fell into a train of mystical fantastic thought.

Time went on, the noise and confusion had for a moment been carried in a different



direction, and comparative silence reigned in the street below ; and Claud started as if a bullet had gone through his heart, for on the stillness of the room broke a sob, clear and distinct, and uttered close beside him. With a spasm of terror he raised his head and looked round. Had his thoughts, indeed, received form and substance ?

White against the grey wall leaned the figure of the monk ! But the hand held no dagger, both were spread over the bowed and quivering face ; and if phantom indeed it were, it was a phantom that wept !

Claud scarcely saw that at his sudden gasp and recoil the hands were removed, and the figure came quickly forward, and not till a light touch was laid upon his arm and a voice gentle and thrilling whispered —

“ Signor, do you not know me ? It is I— your friend—Nina. Have you forgotten Nina ? ” did sense in any measure come back to him.

“ Nina,” he stammered. “ Nina ? Impossible ! Nina, is it you indeed ? How did you get here ? Why do you come ? Who gave you leave ? Who admitted you ? The sentry dare not for his life let anyone pass—the turnkeys are strictly charged. Nina, is it you ? Can you work miracles ? Can you make yourself invisible ? ”

She knew the sort of terror that had taken

possession of him, and stood quietly during these rapid questions, her hand still upon his arm, her eyes, brimming over with pity, raised to his.

"It is I myself, signor; no other. This dress has startled you; I wear it as a disguise. I am come to pay a part, a small part, of the great debt I owe. Listen, signor. You will leave this prison—outside there is life and liberty. Only we must hurry, for time is precious."

"Leave the prison? Life and liberty? Nina!"

Looking at her with a bewildered face, he drew back, passed his hand across his forehead, and muttered —

"It is a phantom, a delusion; I must be mad!"

She caught his arm again in terror.

"Oh, signor, will you not believe me? I am no phantom. I can explain everything. But the time is so short. Do you not hear the shouting of the people? Your friends Colonel Chevelure and Captain Brandenburg are leading them. They feign to attack the gates. They have prevented any additional force being sent here. Sentries, turnkeys—there are none. Every man stands at the gate. The passages are empty, the doors are open; I have the Governor's private key. There is a disguise for you, and a guide

awaits you outside. You will pass into an empty street; from there you will mingle with the crowd. There is help at hand. Before an hour is over all Naples may search for you in vain. Oh, speak, signor; do you understand me?"

For his eyes, fixed on her with a terrified look, almost made her think that reason was leaving him.

He began to comprehend, but the suddenness was too much for him; and then, a horrible thought. Why had Nina done this? Could he be so base as to take advantage of her heroism, and leave the miserable tale to be told afterwards? Impossible!

"Leave me, Nina—go—let me perish. You don't know me; if you did, you would never look at me again."

He turned away, and stood with folded arms, as if determined not to stir. And after all, after all, was she, indeed, powerless to save him?

The feeling that Nina had crushed, and stifled, and numbed, and hurried, bleeding and inanimate, but not dead, into a hasty grave, rose up living and strong, and mightier than all her being beside, and for one moment took entire possession of her.

"Claud, Claud, I would die for you—die for you!" And she sank down, and hid her face on the table, and let the bursting

sobs have their way. But only for a moment.

Somebody sings that "Love will still be lord of all," and whoever it is, he sings the truth. So unlimited is this mighty power, that it conquers all things, even itself. And this by the aid of an ally, who, invoked even at the weakest moment, never fails. A spirit with many names, but only one being. The spirit that guides the martyr's hand when he signs the declaration that condemns him to the stake. The spirit that refuses to let the soldier stir when he stands at his post with a hundred of the enemies' bayonets flashing in his eyes. The spirit that rings in the captain's clear voice when the wreck is settling down, and the last boat moves away, unable to hold one more, and he is left alone on deck, giving his final order "to pull hard and get out fo danger."

And it was this great spirit who, called by Nina in her moment of weakness and agony, came and took her by the hand and raised her up, and placed her before Claud's eyes, with a pale and stricken face indeed, but so calm, so wonderfully calm, that he suddenly stopped the reproaches he was heaping on himself to think, "Did I dream? What did I hear?"

And Nina, supported by the same powerful inspiration, repeated her words, only

now in a steady tone of determination, as if asserting a simple and unquestionable fact.

"I would lay down my life for you, signor. Have you not done it for me? Once, twice, and oftener. And will you not let me save you? Will you die this horrible death, and leave me to remorse and anguish for ever? Hear me. I swear that if you refuse to save yourself, I will remain here, and be taken again, and perish with you!"

Claud's face turned whiter than the moonlight, and in a hoarse, hollow voice he said abruptly —

"Nina, I am married. Do you understand what I am saying? I am married—married."

"I know it," she answered quietly. Her voice was full of interest, anxiety, and pity, but not one shade of blame.

"You know it? Oh, Nina!"

For one moment she turned her head away, but when she looked back her face was calmer than before.

"You know it, and you come to save me. Nina, you are more than human."

"Hush, signor; if I have done any good thing, it has been by imitating you."

"Let me speak," he began. "I meant to say—there was no opportunity. I discovered too late. Oh, Nina, I have been to blame"—

And there he stopped. What could he

say? In such a case as this self-reproach and excuse were worse than silence. Nothing had ever been open or acknowledged between them, yet he knew that what she said was true, that she would lay down her life for him.

In a moment he began again.

"Nina, you must think me a heartless wretch, without honour or feeling. But when I first saw you, when I first knew you, I never guessed that other ties, other remembrances—that my selfishness would cause—that my weak folly—oh, worse than folly—wicked madness— Oh, Nina, how you must despise me!"

She had tried to stop him with an imploring face and uplifted hand, but in vain. Now he ceased suddenly, for, in fact, all his feelings were contained in that last sentence.

"No more," she said in a hurried whisper, "not a word. I know everything. If there have been faults and follies, they are mine. Since we first met, the advantage has been all to me, the harm to you. I know the evil that I have done. Through me your life is blighted, and the sunshine gone out of it"—

"Nina—oh, Nina!" —

"Let me speak," she went on passionately. "I know that I am a snare and a stumbling-block to all that cross the path I must travel, therefore with my own hands will I put you

out of that path. Friends or foes, happiness or misery, I have swept all those thoughts away. You yourself, signor, have taught me that a loyal heart is better than king and country, a richer possession than life and love. What I try to do for you is a debt, and you gave to me a free gift. Oh, Claud, did you think so basely of Nina, that she would stand quietly aside, and let you die!"

And bearing herself as bravely as her brave words, till memory suddenly rushed in with all that he had done for her, and been to her; the noblest creature, so she thought, that earth had ever held; and the dear familiar name, so cherished, though seldom spoken, passed her lips, and her painfully-acquired fortitude trembled in the balance, and was all but gone.

It was almost impossible to mistake the tone in which she said these last words, but so quickly did she gather up her broken resolution and put it together, and nerve her faltering heart with an agonised whisper, "Not yet, not yet," that Claud, confused and agitated, could scarcely trust his senses; could not make out whether these moments of heartbreak were real or only his fancy. Had he less to reproach himself with than he believed, or did a life made desolate lie at his door? He would have said something,

but Nina raised her hand with authority, stopping him.

"We have no time to speak," she said, calm and resolute as before. "You must disguise yourself, signor, and go. I will call your guide."

Noiselessly the door turned on its hinges, and for the few seconds that she was absent Claud stood like one stupified, saying to himself, "It is a dream."

She returned, but not alone. A Sister of Mercy entered behind her, and remained standing at the door. Nina carried in her arms a long black cloak and broad-brimmed Spanish hat.

"See," she said to Claud, "this is the best and quickest disguise for the moment. It is a domino so common that no suspicion attaches to the wearer, even if known to be a disguise. And face and figure are both concealed."

"Nina, dear Nina, I am bewildered. I cannot thank you, I can scarcely think, but one thing I must know. If I escape now where do I go? Do I leave Naples?"

"This night," she answered promptly.

"Ah, Nina, forgive me, I am not ungrateful, but I am desperate. How can I go leaving one behind me dearer than life itself? Leaving her to the mercy of a bitter enemy who will hunt her to death. How can



I help her, how gain tidings of her? My few friends are under suspicion, possibly they may not save themselves. I cannot ask you to do this, you know whom I speak of."

He was getting dreadfully embarrassed.

"Of your wife," said Nina gently. "Of Fleur-de-Lys."

"You know her?" he exclaimed aghast.

"I know her well," she replied. "Will you promise me, signor, that if I set your mind at rest concerning her safety, you will instantly put on this disguise, listen to my directions and go and save yourself."

"I will, I will," he said breathlessly.

Nina beckoned forward the sister of mercy. Her head was bent down and the black veil fell over her face. She stood before them trembling and shaking as in an ague fit.

"This is your guide and companion," said Nina to Claud. "You will not leave Naples alone; and Fleur-de-Lys' best protector will be her own husband."

As she spoke she threw back the veil and hood, and softly kissed the Sister's pale cheek. A shower of golden curls fell over the black mantle, and a face looked out of them, which even now, white and worn with ceaseless tears, was a perfect vision of beauty.

"Fleur-de-Lys!"

"Claud!"

These were the only two words spoken, and perhaps Nina did not hear them, for before they were uttered she was standing at the door, her head in the passage, listening with intense eagerness to the sounds from the gate. In a few minutes she came back.

"Signor, I have your promise. Quick now, every moment is worth a life. Urge him, dear Fleur-de-Lys."

Claud was himself again at once. The cloak and hat were on in a moment, and he turned to Nina, trying to express what he felt.

"Oh, Nina, how can I speak, what can I say! Ten lives would not repay what you" —

And there he broke down.

"She is an angel, Claud," said the beautiful French girl.

"I know it," he answered under his breath.

"Attend to me," said Nina hurriedly, "lose not a word. You will go through the Governor's private door, Fleur-de-Lys has the key. You will meet no one. The only watch on all this side of the building is bribed. They will keep away for their own sakes. When safe out throw the key inside near the right post. The door closes with a spring. The passage you come into will be empty. Hasten out, mingle with the crowd,

they will make way for you, no Neapolitan will bar a Sister of Mercy on her holy errand. Push on to the further end of the Toledo. There you will see a Calesso with a white horse and a black one; stop before it; the driver will look at you and cross his fingers—thus. You will say to him, ‘Castello.’ He will drive you to the landing-place. A boat with eight oars lies in the shadow. He who steers will make the same sign, and you will answer with the same word. Enter the boat. Fear nothing. A felucca waits at the entrance of the bay. Her anchor is up, her sails bent on, the wind is fair. Three minutes after you touch the deck you will be leaving Naples behind you. The Patrone has orders to put himself under the protection of the first English man-of-war he falls in with. Avoid the French cruisers. Make for Malta. There you are safe, and can secure an easy passage to England. Your mother’s family is powerful, your future will be their care. My task is ended when the felucca is fairly on her course. Remember, the Patrone is ordered to send up three lights in quick succession to the mast-head, as soon as the vessel clears the bay. See that this is done, it is the signal of safety. There will be anxious eyes watching for them. I must remain here till then, to make sure that the escape is not discovered. After that I may

go. Now we must part. Heaven bless you both and give you long years of happiness!"

But composed and grave as was Nina's manner while giving these directions, Claud was startled at the ghastly look in her face.

"Nina, you are ill, we cannot leave you, you are not fit to" —

"Go, go," she moaned. "You kill me if you stay."

"But yourself," he said desperately, all sorts of dreadful suspicions darting through his mind. "Are you safe? What will you do? How get away?"

"There will be time," she said, "and if not I have a powerful friend who will come to my aid. Fear nothing for me."

"You are sure," he said, his face still full of anxiety. "This friend, is he here, at hand, within the walls?"

"Yes," she answered after a moment's pause, "he is within the walls."

"And with authority?" he went on rapidly, "really with power to command? Able to enforce obedience?"

"None can say him nay," she answered in a scarcely audible voice.

"It is the Governor she means," whispered Fleur-de-Lys in Claud's ear, "he is her devoted friend; his father's house is her home."

But Nina did not speak of Giacomo.

"Ah!" Claud said reassured, remembering all Giacomo's kind offices to himself, "she could not be in better hands!"

Nina roused herself from a momentary abstraction.

"You *must* go," she urged, "the least delay is ruination. Quick, quick, if anything untoward happens we are all lost. Oh Heaven have mercy!" she almost shrieked, "the shouts are growing less. Can there be a mistake—treachery—anything" —

But the short calm was succeeded by such a tenfold clamour, that it seemed as if all Naples were battering at the gate.

"Now is the time," gasped Nina, "I hear the Castellano war cry. That was an arranged signal. Go, go, go! every moment's delay is destruction!"

But to their unutterable horror, footsteps were heard running along the passage which led to Claud's room.

Still as death the three stood, like statues of despair. The footsteps approached. Nearer, nearer; close now at the door, and passed! Still running, flying in the opposite direction.

"I know," whispered Nina, with white lips, "it is someone sent from the back of the prison to summon help. Now, not a moment, others may come."

There was no time for leave-taking.

Claud knelt down and clasped Nina's hands in his own.

"Noble Nina, heart of gold, farewell!"

Fleur-de-Lys threw her arms round her, sobbing convulsively.

"Take her away, Claud," gasped Nina, "I cannot bear it any longer."

Claud took his wife in his arms and carried her out of the room. The door shut softly. Nina was left alone.

For a little while her whole being seemed concentrated in the act of listening. But everything remained quiet. Then she roused herself. She knew that leaving the prison by the private passage, the fugitives must in a few minutes pass the room she was in. She hurried to the window, climbed up the projecting stones, and clutching the bars with both hands, bent a desperate gaze on the street below.

The crowd scuffled and jostled each other without respect to persons, some making for the Toledo, some for the prison gates, and presently the muffled, Spanish-looking man, and the Sister of Mercy, wrapped in her long veil, walking rapidly down the street, came in sight.

Closer still Nina's white face was pressed to the bars, watching them with agonised eagerness. Everywhere the crowd gave way as much as possible to the holy

Sister, and in two minutes they had turned the corner and were out of sight. She looked towards the bay. There lay the felucca motionless in the moonlight. She knew it by a red light hung midway up the mast.

"Half-an-hour yet," she murmured, descending from her elevation.

She seated herself at the table. In the prison all was quiet, but outside the same clamour continued. How the time passed she never knew, but she felt at last instinctively that it *had* passed, and she might look out again.

Once more she climbed to the window. The felucca had not moved, and the red light still burned. She held on to the bars, and determined to wait. In about ten minutes more she plainly distinguished a boat pulling from the shore with extraordinary swiftness. It neared the felucca, and was lost in her shadow. In a few seconds it reappeared, gliding in an opposite direction. Then the sails began to fill, the mast seemed to change its place, and the red light became invisible. The ship was moving. Slowly, slowly, she went on her way. Farther out, farther still, past the fortifications, clearing the harbour, at the entrance now, and now fairly out into the bay.

Wildly staring, Nina's eyes followed her.

And now up to the topmast shot a brilliant light. In a second, another, then another. The three burned brightly for a short space, and then were suddenly extinguished without being again lowered.

For a few minutes longer the white sails of the felucca were visible in the moonlight, as with every stitch of canvas set, the little vessel sped away before a brisk wind in the direction of Malta. The distance increased, she dwindled in size, faded, disappeared. They were gone!

Then Nina's hold relaxed, and she half slid, half fell, and lay all moaning and shuddering, gathered in a heap on the floor.

"Gone!" she moaned, "gone for ever! Never to look upon his face again, never to hear his voice. But I have saved him; I have borne it all; I have done to the very uttermost. Oh! Mother of Mercy! is it not enough? Have pity on me now and let me die."

And then came the rack of sudden, tearing pain. Through her limbs, through her heart, ran the messengers of torture like burning spears; she had felt such agonies before, but never like this. She could have shrieked aloud, but true to her resolution, she kept down the bursting cries, fearful of an alarm even at the eleventh hour.

But this could not last many minutes.



She fell back exhausted, and lay stretched on the floor, happily insensible both to bodily and mental torture.

About an hour passed by. Other eyes had watched those signal lights, and as soon as they had disappeared, a most peculiar thrilling call, as from a silver bugle, was heard in quick succession from various parts of the city.

Many a one in the crowd shouted, "That is the Castellano bugle, the Duke's own call."

A report was soon spread that the Duke was entering the town, and everyone urged everyone to fly and meet him. Away went the excitable mob, but as no especial point had been named for the Duke's entry, they all rushed in different directions.

The soldier-like men who had excited Giacomo's curiosity, disappeared among the rioters. In less than an hour only a few loiterers remained before the prison. The crowd spent the greater part of the night running backwards and forwards between the different gates of the city; and disappointed at all, formed into little knots, and discussed the probability of the Duke having entered, and being concealed in the town.

A few, who essayed to return to the prison, found their way impeded by a regiment of Lancers, which had at last made its appearance. So those who had homes retreated to

them, and those who had not, curled themselves up under the nearest porch and fell asleep.

Giacomo, finding his incomprehensible besiegers vanished, and knowing that the Lancers patrolling the streets would prevent them from reassembling ; after seeing things a little restored to order, and leaving various directions to be observed, hurried away to look after his prisoners, and first of all bent his steps, with a curious mixture of feelings, to Claud's apartment. He had begun to divine a little what this strange attack might mean, and though determined to do his duty to the uttermost, was not oppressed by any great dismay at the thought of some of his prisoners escaping.

He went first to his own quarters for the key of Claud's room, which he always kept there. It was gone ! After that he was not surprised to find it in the lock, and without even the farce of turning it, or examining the bolts, which were all shot back, he simply opened the door and went in.

Nor was he surprised to find the room empty, and no response to his call. Empty at first it appeared to be, but on looking round more closely, he observed through the dim light some white object lying near the window.

Hurrying up and examining this object,

his surprise became amazement at beholding the dress of a white Carmelite monk, and, stooping down to lift up the head, amazement became bewilderment and horror on recognising Nina. Alive, but perfectly insensible, her hands cold and damp, her face whiter than death itself, her teeth clenched as with pain.

For a few minutes he was so dazed and terrified that he did nothing; then he lifted her on to the prisoner's bed, chafed her hands, bathed her face with water, and at last saw signs of returning life.

Meantime his mind ran through every imaginable possibility that could have brought her there, and found no foundation to rest on.

How did she get in? And for what? What brought her to that room? And why in that dress? And the cause of her present condition? If, as a wild fancy suggested, she had come into the city, found it impossible to return, and made her way to him for shelter, what was she doing in the Frenchman's cell? Where was Margherita? And beyond all the rest, how had an entrance been effected at all? And mystery and chaos were the only answer. He could not summon help, for he felt that her presence there under any circumstances had better not be known. Besides, all the inmates of

the prison were busy at the other end, and he feared to leave her alone again. By degrees she recovered. Slowly she opened her eyes, and with joy and thankfulness he saw that she was conscious.

"Nina, gentilissima," he said softly, kneeling beside the bed, "how did you come here? You have been ill, dear Nina. I am so puzzled. Can you tell me anything?"

Nina put out her hand and whispered —

"Giacomo, dear Giacomo" (how his heart beat!), "you will not send after him; you will let him escape; it will not harm you; for my sake, Giacomo."

She was evidently unconscious of the time that had elapsed, for the fugitives were beyond recall. But no language can express the chill that her words struck to Giacomo's heart. He forced himself to be calm.

"You mean Captain de Meronne," he said, still softly. "Did you help him to escape, Nina?"

"Yes," she answered, in the same whisper, "he is gone. You will never find him; he is on the sea."

"Why did you help him?" he asked, still keeping his rebellious voice under.

Nina's eyes looked heavy; she opened them with difficulty, and seemed unable to answer. The suspense was killing Giacomo. But how could he ask questions as to when

and where she had met this Frenchman. No matter all that for the present, but the one horrible doubt *must* be solved. He must himself give the hideous shadow a form. Quickly and sharply he did it.

"Nina, did you love this man?"

"Better than my life," she answered, with momentary energy, "next to my soul's salvation!"

"Oh, Nina, Nina," he exclaimed in sudden despair, "do you not know that *I* love you, I, wretched Giacomo, and that your words kill me?"

Nina roused herself for a moment.

"Giacomo, forgive me; I never knew it. You were so good always, a dear brother, I thought you so. It matters very little now. You will forget me soon, and be happy. Dear Giacomo!"

The words that rose to his lips were stopped by a change that seemed to pass over her face. Her eyes, wide open and bright, seemed to be gazing at him earnestly; yet she held out her hand as if feeling blindly for his. He took it between his own, though with what bitterness of heart Heaven who watched him only knew.

"Giacomo, I had a penance. It is over now. Our Lady has forgiven me. She smiled and laid her hand upon my head. And the curse is gone; I have taken it away.

by a great atonement ; it shall never vex us more ! ”

Her eyes grew heavy again, and a dulness came over them.

“ Hush,” she said, trying to raise herself on the pillow, “ they come for me. I hear their sweeping wings ! ”

“ Nina, Nina,” groaned Giacomo, as the dreadful thought rushed into his mind, “ you are not going to leave me utterly alone ? ”

She made no answer, but turned her face towards him, and like a sudden flash all her amazing beauty came back to her fourfold. Giacomo gazed at her entranced. Never in her loveliest moods had he seen her wear such a look as that. No, nor never would again, for the soul at that moment, freed from the burden of mortality, passed away, leaving the reflection of its glory on the body in which it had suffered and conquered.

And Giacomo, still regarding her earnestly, soon saw that the eyes he fancied looking at him were glazed and sightless, and then, slowly and heavily, the lids began to droop, fell half way, and moved no more.

But he remained kneeling and holding the hand, now cold, and heavy as lead.

“ Nina,” he whispered, “ Nina ! ”

Alas ! poor Giacomo. Soft whisper, loud call, stirring shout, all would be the same.

Never till the archangel stands upon the earth, and summons the dead from the north, and the south, and the east, and the west, will your voice reach Nina's ears !

A long time so he knelt, then started horribly, noticing an ashy grey that had settled on those beautiful features. He jumped up, placed his hand on her pulse, her heart, put his ear to her lips, moved the already stiffening limbs, that dropped with a dead weight from his touch. In vain, in vain. Let her be, Giacomo ; let weary Nina sleep her last sleep !

With a groan that was almost a shout he rushed towards the door as if to call for help, but stopped midway, stumbled, staggered on a few steps ; a dark red flush mounted to his face ; with a smothered cry he stretched out his arms, fell forward on the earth, and lay there.

About two hours afterwards, the presence of the Governor being required, and he nowhere to be found, a messenger was despatched to his own quarters, to see if he could be there, though not at all likely, being so much needed elsewhere. Nor was he ; and the messenger returning from his fruitless errand, was struck by the appearance, a most startling one, of the key which still remained in the lock of the door where

Giacomo had left it when he entered Claud's room.

The messenger at first hesitated, then tapped at the door, and receiving no answer, went in.

On the ground before him with his face towards the door, lay the Governor. At first the man thought him dead, but examining closely found feeble signs of life. The prisoner was gone. There were no traces of disorder in the room, no appearance of any struggle having taken place, no evidence of flight or hurry; nothing unusual in the disposal of the furniture, except that the bed was crushed and disarranged as if someone had lain there; and it was not the prisoner's habit ever to lie down in the day time, or indeed till late at night. This therefore looked curious, and the insensible state of the Governor startling and incomprehensible.

Terrified, the man rushed out shouting. Help soon arrived. Giacomo was conveyed to his own bed; physicians were summoned; by the morning life returned, but not consciousness; he was in a brain fever.

Messengers were despatched to the Piazza d'Oro, to inform Maestro Capri of his son's critical condition.

There all was confusion and dismay. The goldsmith was from home, and his wife



nearly crazed with terror at Nina's non-appearance the previous night. She had remained up, hoping and waiting though almost desperate, till daylight; and then Margherita returned alone, wailing for her young mistress. All she could tell was, that Nina had left her in a sheltered porch for a moment, while she stepped back into a shop for something left behind. That she had waited in great uneasiness for upwards of an hour, fearing to move lest her mistress should come and find her gone, that she then went into the shop herself, and could find her nowhere, and no one had seen her. She then went back to the porch and waited another hour, and after that, assisted by some friends, had traversed the streets till daylight, in the hope of hearing some tidings of her, but not a sign, not a trace. Worn out and broken-hearted, at last she crept home.

Almost imbecile from the two great blows that had fallen upon her at once, Madama Capri went to sit by her son's bedside. All that was known, or could be guessed of his illness was, that he had exerted himself immensely for many hours, burdened at the same time with a heavy responsibility, that hastening the first leisure moment to look after his most important prisoner, either the latter had stunned him with a sudden blow, and then made his own escape, or finding

him already gone, the shock combined with the previous fatigue and anxiety had caused a stroke of apoplexy.

The doctor's gave their veto against the former explanation, finding no marks of violence, and the latter soon became the generally received idea.

Though the mode of escape was unknown there was nothing very wonderful in it, considering the amount of confusion, and absence of all guard that night.

The watch bribed by Nina declared that they had neither seen nor heard anything, and whether the prisoner's door was unlocked by the Governor himself, or he found it open, in his present condition could not be ascertained.

The evening following the goldsmith returned home, bringing disastrous tidings which soon spread over the whole city. So far from Duke Castellano having entered Naples with a victorious army, that ill-fated nobleman had died that very night of wounds received some months before.

The goldsmith also made known to his wife, that the note which he had received from Father Francesco, was to the effect that the Duke was dying, and he, the Padre, had been summoned to receive his last confession and instructions, which could not be entrusted to a less confidential friend.

Furthermore, the Duke and his followers were in a wretched state of starvation and misery, and the staunch old goldsmith had drawn largely on his own resources, as well as the funds held in trust for the Castellano family to lessen their sufferings.

He had been present at the Duke's death, had seen Father Francesco, and received instructions from him, to return and lighten the blow as much as possible to the Duke's unhappy daughter. This was the melancholy secret between the goldsmith and his son that had so puzzled madama.

The chaos of trouble and mystery which he found on his arrival at home almost overwhelmed the unfortunate Capri. As soon as the first shock was over, a regular and systematic search for the missing Nina was instituted. The city was hunted up and down; money, influence, authority, nothing was spared. But as well might they have searched for a wreath of smoke, or a shadow cast by yesterday's sun; not the smallest trace or tidings of her were ever from that moment seen or heard.

Not only to the Capri family was Nina's disappearance an agonizing mystery.

Chevelure having ascertained by the preconcerted signals, that the bold attempt had succeeded, and by means of the Castellano bugle diverted the popular mind from fur-

ther mischief, he and Brandenburg disappeared, and their men melted away like mist in the various streets and lanes and at every corner and turning, till none of them were left, and then Chevelure hurried to a place appointed where he was either to see or receive tidings from Nina. But he waited in vain.

Nina had not been very explicit as to the latter portion of her plan for Claud's rescue. She had undertaken to do it; "she had the means," she said, "if that part of the prison could be left unguarded for a couple of hours." But as to whether she would accomplish it herself or by deputy, Chevelure was not quite certain.

Yet he felt sure that she would not return home till all was safe, and knowing the hour would be late, had determined to carry her to the Ursuline Convent till next day, when she could give any reason she pleased to her friends for her non-appearance. The disturbed state of the city would be quite reason sufficient for seeking refuge in a convent.

But hour after hour passed, and at last Chevelure was forced to return home to rest, concluding and hoping that Nina had been prevented in some way from keeping her promise to him that night.

The whole of the next day he waited

anxiously for news. None. He heard of Claud's escape, of the mysterious illness of the Governor of the prison, but nothing that threw any light on Nina's silence. He then employed spies and reporters, who brought a full account of all that happened in the Capri dwelling; and then, indeed, he became alarmed, almost to agony.

Nina had never returned home that night at all, nor had she been heard of since. What could have become of her? In addition to the search set on foot by the goldsmith, a still more rigorous one was commenced by Chevelure and Brandenburg. They had means of ferreting out everything in the shape of concealed crime, and they used them freely, but no result.

Not only had Nina herself disappeared, but every trace and clue to her existence was lost from the moment that she left Margherita in the porch. Hours became days; days weeks; weeks months; the seasons changed; time went on; mistakes were rectified; missing people discovered; mysteries cleared up; strange coincidences explained—but the blackness of darkness hung over Nina's fate still. The fruitless search was at last given up in despair.

When the news of Claud's escape was reported to the General commanding, that officer, to the great astonishment of the

orderly who conveyed the despatch, ejaculated a fervent "Thank Heaven!" which he afterwards changed into "Thank Heaven 'tis no worse."

But it was observed by all those who came in contact with him that the old man's face looked as bright that day as if he had received some wonderfully good news, and so happy and genial was his temper that it was quite impossible to make him say a harsh word or give a hard order; and as for his directions for intercepting the fugitive, so inconsistent and contradictory were they that had he been trying to screen him he could not have taken more effectual means; which, of course, was entirely to be attributed to his vexation and bewilderment of mind. And his last thought that night before falling into a delicious sleep was—"Poor fellow! I hope he's safe away, and that pretty girl with him."

And the Secretary gnashed his teeth, and foamed with rage, for not only his hated enemy, but the girl whom he still hoped to make his wife had disappeared—slipped both of them from his clutches; and wild pangs of jealousy told him they were together.

Meantime the amnesty foretold by Giacomo had been published, and all rebels laid down their arms and walked about fearlessly.

Father Francesco returned to Naples a dreary, woe-begone shadow, and joined his efforts with those of the goldsmith to discover the dearly-loved lost daughter of his dead friend and patron.

Never to anyone did the Priest breathe a word of his own possible share in Nina's fate. The little taint of Jesuitry that corrupted his otherwise fine character was the reason of this. That she had followed his injunctions and succeeded he discovered, but that threw no light whatever on her strange disappearance. Had she been murdered some trace must remain; and the only other possibility, that she had for some reason left Naples with Fleur-de-Lys and her husband, was incongruous and ridiculous.

This same idea had occurred once to Chevelure in a moment of weariness and despondency, and it brought a jealous smart with it; but the return of the felucca, and the testimony of the master, who spoke of landing his *two* passengers safely at Malta, tore that supposition to shreds.

But the Padre said nothing of this. The only explanation he gave was that the penance imposed on her need not have caused any distress whatever; it was rather a complicated task, but one which he truly believed she would find great pleasure in fulfilling. And so the mystery was deeper than before. And

Father Francesco searched and searched, using all the secret agencies of his Order: and madama, weeping by Giacomo's bed, said —

“If she is on the earth the Padre will find her.”

But he did not find her.

No wraith in the moonlight ever disappeared more utterly than did Duke Castellano's daughter.

Strange stories began to circulate, for by degrees it oozed out that Madama Capri's supposed niece was the daughter of the great Duke living disguised. In the misery of that household secrets could not be maintained.

Rumours floated here and there, some ludicrous, some almost appalling.

The Castellano bugle-call, which had been heard all over Naples the night of the Duke's death, was never mentioned without a shudder. The story of the black statue, embellished and exaggerated by the Cameriera, was told on the winter evenings round the tiny stove, with white cheeks and chattering teeth.

Also an account of Nina's appearance in the balcony of the Castellano palace, the night that the Duke received his death wound, circulated among all classes, garbled and distorted into every shape of horror.



And besides these, another more formidable, because more truthful, tale became known.

The night of the riot a priest, who had been summoned to shrive a dying prisoner, was walking on the roof of the prison, waiting to leave till the streets should be cleared, and suddenly came upon an open skylight overlooking that part of the building containing the Governor's quarters. He knew the prison well, and the position of every cell in it. He looked down and saw, what for the moment made his heart stand still. A figure well-known and impossible to forget. The Castellano spectre. He was connected with the Castellano family from having been employed at one time to arrange documents for them, hunt out pedigrees, &c. He knew the legend thoroughly, had seen the veiled picture, and was prepared to attest the truth of what he said, in any manner his questioners pleased. He was a grave man, much esteemed for truthfulness, learning, and piety.

"The figure stood," he said, "in a strip of moonlight that fell from an opposite window. He saw it as plainly as he saw the breviary in his own hand. He looked at it for full two minutes. The face was unmistakable, and the dress, but there were slight differences in its appearance to what he had

both heard and seen represented. There was no dagger in the hand; the two were folded together almost in an attitude of prayer; and the face, though unutterably sorrowful, was sweet and holy. It stood close to the door of the cell where the Governor had been found senseless. While he still looked it disappeared; the moonlight seemed to swallow it up."

This story, once heard, was believed without question. The resemblance of the figure to the one seen in the balcony of the Castellano palace had a ghastly meaning for many who had witnessed the discovery of the latter. And the circumstance of her unaccountable disappearance from the strong room where she was confined, and every bar and bolt left securely fastened, was again revived and eagerly discussed. And the state in which Giacomo was found, and had continued ever since, seemed fully to bear out the penalty of madness, said to follow any intercourse with the spectre.

It was in vain that Father Francesco and the Capris on the one hand, and Chevelure and Brandenburg on the other, put together and tried to make some meaning out of this mysterious chaos; nothing fitted, nothing was explained.

Madama all through clung to the belief that the opening of the letter on All Holy

Eve had been the cause of the whole disaster; and strange to say, Giacomo throughout his delirium raved incessantly of Nina and the spectre, all confused and jumbled together, and his mother listened with awe, and the goldsmith shook his head, and the Priest pressed his thin hand over his sunken eyes and said —

“It is beyond me!”

Giacomo lingered on some months. The fever left him, but his senses never returned. When nature for a moment rallied, some crushing weight on his mind seemed to war against her. He grew weaker and weaker.

One lovely evening in spring, when madama, sitting beside him and holding his hand in hers, felt the fluttering pulse beat more faintly every moment, he suddenly opened his eyes, clear and conscious for the first time, and whispered—

“Mother, where is Nina?”

But before the startled old lady could answer, he lay back with a weary sigh, closed his eyes again, and died.

Alas! for the poor Capris. Their house was indeed left unto them desolate.

Shortly after the proclamation of the amnesty, the body of Duke Castellano was brought to Naples, and buried with little pomp but much solemnity in the family

vault. With him died out the direct line, that is, those in straight descent from the ancestor who was called "the wicked Duke," and whose evil deeds had originated the legend which attached to their house. And though many collateral branches existed in various parts of Italy, yet at that troubled epoch no one stepped forward to claim the title and estates, the former a dangerous distinction, the latter confiscated by the French Government.

The Duke was buried at midnight. Father Francesco, the goldsmith, the physician, and a few old retainers, were all that attended this illustrious champion of Naples to his last resting-place.

But as the coffin was lifted from before the altar to be carried to the vault, a tall figure wrapped in a long black cloak emerged from the shadow and placed himself at the head of the procession, in the position of chief mourner.

There was a momentary pause and hesitation, and then Father Francesco addressed the stranger.

"Signor, this is a private ceremony, but I doubt not that you intend honour to the dead. May I ask, were you his friend?"

"I was an enemy," was the answer. "On this coffin I lay down my enmity and register a vow. Suffer me to remain in the place I

have chosen; I have a better right there than you dream of."

It did not require the French tongue in which this answer was given to show Father Francesco that this was one of the hateful race of usurpers; he had guessed it before. But the act, which in itself was homage, the grave, truthful words, the proud, pale face and melancholy eyes, in no way corresponded with tyranny and contempt. Father Francesco drew back.

"As you will, signor. You have proved your right among us, in that you honour the illustrious dead."

At the conclusion of the ceremony the stranger disappeared without another word, but it was found that he had placed in the hands of the officiating priest an immense sum of money, to be expended in charity among the Duke's followers.

Father Francesco's last hope, that some tidings from Fleur-de-Lys might at length solve the heart-breaking mystery of Nina's disappearance, was doomed to be disappointed.

In the then disturbed state of Europe, letters were indeed angelic visitants, few and far between. Mails could not pass to and from hostile countries, and even between friendly ones were often lost, delayed, or sunk by an enemy's ship. And though

Fleur-de-Lys tried in every way to give her uncle news of her safe arrival in England, and to pour out her heart in love and gratitude to the friend who had rendered her such mighty assistance, she never found an opportunity of getting a letter conveyed to Naples. Claud meeting by chance with a friend, a prisoner of war in England, entrusted to him a verbal message for Chevelure, in case he should either return to France himself, or find anyone he could trust to deliver the message.

He feared to write, for the subject was a dangerous one, and a letter intercepted might cause incalculable mischief. But the message was never received, and after a very short stay in England Claud and his wife sailed for the New World, where a career was opened to him through the influence of his mother's family.

For three years Chevelure remained in Naples. He received repeated offers of reinstatement, but declined them all.

He shunned society, and spent his whole time penetrating into every locality, and among every class of people, doggedly seeking some trace of his lost loadstar. Brandenburg was his companion for the time that he remained, which was not long, and though both worked with untiring energy, no light whatever was thrown on the mystery. The

conviction at last settled down on the minds of both, even the matter-of-fact Brandenburg; that the superhuman beauty which had so suddenly ceased to be—for in this way only could its disappearance be described—had vanished from the earth by superhuman means; and though this conviction was never mentioned in direct words between them, each understood the other's feeling, and yet both shrank from openly expressing it.

Doubtless the different temperament of the two would have given a very different form and colouring to the mutual idea; but it was never put into any tangible figure of speech, so neither knew the precise nature of the other's fancy.

In the course of his search, Chevelure hunted out and contrived to establish a kind of friendship with the herbalist, whose chance meeting with Claud and mysterious words the latter had spoken of more than once. The old recluse had never forgotten the courteous young Frenchman, and, discovering Chevelure to be his friend, expressed strong interest in his welfare. Chevelure told him all that had occurred, and then with passionate earnestness besought the old man to explain the ambiguous hints and warnings that he had given his companion that evening.

"What do you wish me to say?" replied the herbalist, fixing his penetrating eyes on Chevelure. "I warned him against danger, and I gave him a little relic whose very form suggests faith in good, and defiance of evil."

"But," urged Chevelure, "why did you enjoin him to wear it especially when wandering on the mountain. What is there to apprehend there more than elsewhere?"

The herbalist looked down gravely, and was silent for a few minutes.

"If I entreated him to wear it there," he said at last, "it was because I saw that some strong fascination brought him to those lonely remote localities."

"Is there danger in fascination?" asked Chevelure quickly.

"The word itself shows that there is," was the reply. "To be fascinated is to lose power over your own actions. The strongest will may oppose, but will seldom overcome a fascination."

"But," persisted Chevelure, "the fascination, once existing, would endure in any locality."

"Not always," said the herbalist with a smile. "The absence of the attracting object is sufficient in many cases to dissolve the charm."

"But," again objected Chevelure, "what



object did you suspect would be likely to attract him to that lonely spot? Why enjoin the relic to be worn on the mountain? I entreat you to explain the meaning of that request. I have the strongest reasons for wishing to know."

"Signor," said the herbalist after some hesitation, "we are all creatures of habit. What we are accustomed to hear as truths, and see received as such, insensibly have weight with us, though if analysed we might reject each item of the whole. Know you not that from time immemorial these burning mountains have been the object of never satisfied curiosity and conjecture. From the Pagan ages, when the God of Armourers and his myrmidons were supposed to inhabit their unexplorable depths, down to the latest imagined phantasy of Christians, that the earth's crust only divides us from the fires of purgatory, mystery and superstition have surrounded them. Strange tales come to us of living men who have disappeared into their fathomless abysses, and yet years after have returned to the earth and given vague hints of the life lived there. I know that they are fables: yet fables are the expression in language of a truth which the mind is incapable of grasping, varying only in form according to the creed and disposition of the people

among whom it has its rise. Every country has a myth of its own concerning the mysterious inhabitants of the earth's centre. Among the northern nations giants and gnomes dwell in the caverns of the mountains, and walk through galleries of costly marble and porphery, glistening spar and crystal; beings, powerful, capricious, malignant, foes to mankind, warring against peace and holiness, always seeking to entrap into their fastnesses unwary travellers, only to be overcome by a faithful heart and clear conscience. How often we read in those wild legends of mortals who have either in error or bravado entered their regions. Some have returned no more, others by marvellous faith and patience have broken the spell that bound them and reappeared on the earth.

In other countries again they take the milder form of fairies or naiads; in others of mighty sorcerers and genii; but though differently coloured the outline of all is the same. Sometimes on the earth's surface, sometimes in its centre, now with a tangible body, now changing into a wreath of smoke, or a jet of water, or vanishing into air altogether: take them all with their various attributes, what are they? None else but what the Christian Creed calls fiends: tortured themselves and torturing others. And is it wonderful that here in this country, where the Church sets

her seal on every tradition and every theory, that so strange and awful a phenomenon as a mountain sending forth torrents of flame, accompanied at intervals by terrific noises, and then subsiding of itself into perfect peace should be regarded by some with superstitious terror. What wonder when sounds are heard resembling groans, mocking laughter, and wild imprecations, that fancy should people these mysterious depths with demons and their victims.

"Be it so," said Chevelure impatiently, "it brings me no nearer to the point for which I am striving. Granting you fiends and tortured spirits, these have no power over our human bodies; never till death frees the soul from all bonds of earth, can it come under their influence."

"How know you that?" said the herbalist.

Chevelure was silent; he had but vague ideas on the subject.

"Your own argument proves it," he said at last; "if they are carried into yonder fiery hollow, death ensues as a matter of course. The boiling flood below would reduce any earthly body to a pulp in half a second."

The herbalist smiled.

"May I ask, signor, if you have ever plunged your arm into a cauldron of boiling metal?"

"I," exclaimed Chevelure, "no, certainly not."

"I have," returned the other quietly, "many times, and you see," baring it to the shoulder, "there is neither stain nor scar upon it."

"What do you mean?" said Chevelure astonished.

"I mean," returned the other, "that nature is full of mysteries. We are accustomed to believe that boiling fluid will torture and scar the flesh. Science will tell you the contrary. I give you a proof of it. I have plunged my arm into molten lead bubbling and hissing from the furnace; the feeling and effect are simply those of moderately cold water. I only say this, signor, to show you that the argument of its destructive power is a weak one. Nature baffles us at every turn. We think we have discovered a law, we spend an immense amount of labour and time in mastering it, and we find in the end that it is but a fragment of one; the law itself still remains above and beyond us. I could give you stronger instances, if necessary, of fire being powerless on the body. Accounts of men who have walked among the flames, and come forth uninjured, of one who, as a reward for unparalleled holiness, was carried from the earth living in a chariot of fire. Think you that he was burned or

hurt? You, signor, will not, perhaps, give to these records all the importance that I do, but you may at least accept them as historical facts."

"I know," said Chevelure quickly, "the instances you allude to, but putting aside my own opinions, are they not what those of your creed call miracles?"

"And what is a miracle?" said the herbalist. "A mighty law of nature, too vast for our tiny minds to conceive, brought to bear on some especial object. It is not for that the less a miracle, nor does the law exist the less, because to us it is unknown and incomprehensible. All nature is a miracle; our own existence the most miraculous part of the whole. Life we know has a law, but who has discovered it? And until it is discovered, who shall presume to say under what conditions it can or cannot exist. We set down in our wisdom the necessary adjuncts of existence; air, heat, light, motion, &c., the toad that lives for centuries enclosed in a solid stone laughs our arguments to scorn."

"Let us come back to where we set out," said Chevelure, "I want my question answered, my doubts solved."

"We have come back," said the herbalist, "we are there. We must acknowledge that the mysterious beings with which superstition peoples these mountains are not im-

possible, for even in our limited knowledge facts exist quite as marvellous. Remember, I am not holding this as my belief. I gave the amulet to your friend on the same principle that I would have given him a sword, were he passing through a forest said to be infested by robbers, or a purifying essence before entering a house supposed to harbour a deadly sickness."

"And these beings," said Chevelure, with eager eyes fixed on his companion, "whether tempters or victims, in the end what becomes of them; where do they go?"

"Every soul has its appointed place," said the herbalist after a pause. "To the evil spirit rejoicing in evil, evil things are apportioned, to those more weak than wicked, who learn to loath the sin committed, and yearn and strive after better things, help, and strength, and opportunity to purge away the dross of their lower nature, and they who by much labour and suffering free themselves from the toils spread round them, who with patience and self-denial, through pain and weeping, journey on faithful to the end, to them victory and glory, to them palm and crown!"

The herbalist ceased speaking, and sank his face in his hands. Chevelure was silent too. They were sitting on a rock facing the west. The day had been rainy, but the

heavy clouds were rolling away now in wild stormy masses, and the sun shone suddenly out from a belt of blue sky. The herbalist raised his head and looked round. Behind them a magnificent rainbow spanned the entire firmament.

"See," he said, placing his hand on Chevelure's arm, "the man of science will tell you the exact materials of which the rainbow is made, the precise conditions under which it will appear, but can he make you a rainbow and spread it across the sky? Can he manufacture the materials out of which the rainbow is made, sunbeam, and atmosphere, and rain-cloud? No; these are produced by far-off laws at which he can but dimly guess, if at all."

Chevelure fell into a fit of abstraction, waking from which, he went back to the former part of the conversation.

"Supposing it possible," he said, "that these weird beings, whatever they are, evil spirits, enchanted mortals, or what not, really exist, and, as you seem to imply, walk upon the earth, and descend into it, and emerge from it by these wonderful passages, how is it that they have never been seen at the moment of appearing or disappearing?"

"Tales and legends do report such appearance and disappearance," said the herbalist; "but even if not, that would be no argument

against it. How often do our senses deceive us? Are we always sure of what we see? Do we never discern in the moonlight figures startlingly real which afterwards turn out to be shadows? Who beholding a meteoric stone fall would believe the black mass at his feet to be the brilliant body of fire which he saw gliding through the air a moment before? Remember again, that I do not say this in support of any fanciful theory, but to warn you from trusting too much to those senses of whose strength or weakness we know but little."

"Does not your purgatory," said Chevélure abruptly, "refer only to the souls of the dead?"

"Signor, my good friend, the word purgatory has a broad meaning. The Church has restricted it to the one sense which she considers most fitting; but every living thing which goes through a course of purification goes through purgatory. Let us put this subject aside, signor; it is unsatisfactory and useless both to you and me."

"Only one question more," said Chevélure in a husky voice as they rose: "Supposing one fallen into the power of these mysterious beings, or worse even, become bound and incorporated with them, is there any means by which they may be traced and rescued?"



The old man turned, and looked gravely into his companion's eyes; then raised his head, and pointed to the twilight sky already studded with stars.

"My friend, see you all those myriad worlds, those uncountable suns, each the centre of a universe, among which the earth we inhabit and all the life in it is less than a drop of water in the ocean, do you reflect how from the earliest records of time they have remained steadfast in their appointed places without ever a break in the universal law that keeps them there, and can you doubt that the Eternal Wisdom, the unceasing goodness, that preserves them, and the mass of intelligent life which we believe them to contain, in harmonious, beautiful, and perfect order, is sufficient to guard one living spirit? Be at peace, signor. A mightier power than any we could use, a conquering love whose height and depth the grandest effort of our mind cannot fathom, will trace and rescue a soul, however sorely beset, however surrounded and guarded by the ministers of wickedness. Look not too deeply into the darkness of mysteries. The evil is sufficient for the day; we can avoid the pitfalls shown by the dear light, when, as we journey, the night comes upon us, and, bewildered in the gloom, we know not where to turn, let us close our eyes and trust."

They walked on in silence. When Chevelure parted from his companion he was certainly a sadder and, perhaps, a wiser man.

Meanwhile where was all that remained of the last descendant of a long line of princes and nobles? Many minutes had not elapsed after Giacomo fell to the ground, when, with cautious steps, two men entered the room. Startled at sight of the Governor prostrate before them, startled still more at the lifeless figure on the bed.

These men were the watch that Nina had bribed.

A hurried conversation ensued.

"Why did not the disguised woman escape with the prisoner? What brought the Governor there? What ailed him? What ailed *her*?"

They soon found out what ailed *her*, and then the question was:

"Had she told him anything? Or had she died before he entered?"

After a hasty discussion they decided that this was the most likely.

"How then could they best screen themselves?"

Could the girl's body be removed all might go well. The Governor evidently had had a fit, perhaps at sight of the corpse; when he came to himself, if no proof were found of

this idea, he might be persuaded that his sight had deceived him.

Terrified at the vengeance that would light on them if their share in the prisoner's escape became known to the French authorities, they determined on a desperate expedient. They had hoped that the cell would have been visited in due time by the proper turnkeys who would have reported the prisoner's escape, which being attributed to the confusion of the night would cause but little inquiry.

The bribe Nina had offered was so large that they could not bring themselves to refuse it; but now how to avoid punishment?

After a rapid consultation they decided to remove the body, and trust to chance and their own good stars.

Quietly and gently they conveyed the dead girl away, and concealed her in a secure hiding place.

Belonging to the prison, but detached from it, lying in a desolate out-of-the-way locality, was a piece of ground, used as a burying place for those prisoners whose death it was not quite convenient to the government to make known.

To this melancholy resting place, on the third night after Claud's escape, did the two warders, trembling and in silence, carry the corpse of the last Castellano. They laid her

in a rough deal coffin hastily put together, dug the grave deep, lowered the body into it without prayer or blessing—feeling all the time that they were committing a sort of sacrilege, but they dared not ask the assistance of a priest—carefully removed every trace of freshly dug earth, placed landmarks by which they would, if necessary, know the spot again, withdrew stealthily in the dark, and left Nina to her rest.

After that, fearing still some possible discovery, both left Naples at the first opportunity, and were heard of no more.

The ring which Nina wore, the Castellan crest, was still on her finger, and sorely tempted were the two culprits to appropriate it; but their terror of detection was so great and the design of the ring so peculiar, that fearing it might be traced, they decided at last to leave it where it was; and the jewel went down with its wearer to a nameless grave.

No wonder that all search was vain. Who was to tell? Claud gone—Giacomo raving in delirium!

The strange tales that were circulated regarding Nina's disappearance, added their weight of evidence to the nameless, formless, ghastly suspicion, which had gradually grown up in the hearts of Chevelure and Brandenburg.

The latter was glad when his regiment was ordered away from Naples. He tried every means to induce Chevelure to leave at the same time, but in vain. Doggedly and angrily the latter declared his resolution of remaining to sift this mystery till he received some token from lost Nina that he should desist.

"Token!" ejaculated Brandenburg aghast. "My good Chevelure you dream—you are following a phantom."

"I am," returned Chevelure fiercely. "And I will follow her to her home among the shadows if she will only show me the way."

Brandenburg found that argument was useless and desisted.

Chevelure remained; but shortly after Murât became King, about the commencement of the war in Spain, he disappeared. Whether he believed himself to have received the expected token no one could know. Some enquiries that were made concerning him only told that the night before he left Naples, he had never slept, but walked about his chamber, talking as if with another person.

The last heard of him was from a celebrated French traveller in the East, many years later, who, falling in upon one occasion with a warlike tribe of Bedouins while crossing the desert, encamped with them for the

night, and sitting beside his watch-fire was surprised to hear a voice address him in French. He looked up, narrowly scanned the features of the Arab who addressed him, and in spite of the disguise of costume, long beard, brown skin and years, he at length recognised a former friend—Chevelure.

They talked together for many hours. Chevelure was courteous as ever, but grave, sad, almost stern, and apparently well fitted to the life he had chosen.

“He had joined the tribe,” he said, “and was now their chief. He liked the life; he hated civilization, he should never return to Europe.”

Yet he enquired warmly after some old friends, especially Brandenburg, and if anything had been heard of Claud de Meronne, who, since his escape from prison in Naples, had given no sign of his existence, and also if any light had been thrown on the means used to free him, which had never been discovered.

The traveller satisfied him as much as lay in his power on these points, and when he took his leave next day, asked his host if he could convey any message for him to France.

“None,” he replied; “I wish to break every tie connected with my former life.”

Chevelure had once called Nina his good, or evil genius; she *should* have been the

former, destiny made her the latter. She was never heard of again.

Brandenburg lived and flourished, married, rose to the highest rank in the Imperial army, and was ever the same genial, warm-hearted little oddity, ready to talk to anyone, at any time, and on any subject, always excepting his short residence in Naples. When that was introduced, he fidgeted, grew silent, and moved away; people said that something which had occurred there, had had the effect of making him serious for once.

The elder Capris soon dropped. Margherita died, still inconsolable for the loss of her darling. Father Francesco entered a monastery of the strictest order, and vanished from the world. In due time the Castellano title and estates were claimed and allowed, and the family again grew and prospered, and with it the tales and legends that had been circulated in Naples about this time, but never again by anyone, at any time or in any place, was the warning spectre of their house, heard, or seen !

## CONCLUSION.

MORE than twenty years had passed away. The Emperor Napoleon was dead. Europe was at peace, as much peace at least as can be expected from an entire quarter of the globe; Charles the Tenth was seated comfortably, or perhaps uncomfortably, on his very rickety throne, when one morning, late in spring, a French frigate sailed into the Bay of Naples.

There was the usual amount of noise and smoke as the stranger saluted, and much more noise, and a great deal more smoke as the battery returned the compliment.

It soon became known that this was no ordinary man-of-war, put in for fresh provisions, or to pay the Neapolitans a visit. She carried passengers, a French nobleman, his wife, and two daughters. And the nobleman brought letters for the King's own hand, written by the hand of the King of France. This was the report, and the report for once was true.

With much ceremony these stately personages were conducted to the hotel prepared for them, and then a private audience with the King was requested, backed by a letter which ensured the desired result.



The interview was long. The letters from the King of France, to his dear cousin of Naples, requested that every facility might be afforded to his tried and faithful friend the Marquis de Meronne in the object which he had come to Naples to prosecute. When the conference was over stringent orders were received by every department of the Neapolitan Government to assist the Marquis to the utmost of their power.

In addition to this the Frenchman was lavish with his money; and what would not money do in Naples fifty years ago, and backed by royal commands.

For some days nothing resulted from a vigorous search instituted by the authorities, but at last an old man was picked out of the obscurity in which he had shrouded himself, and carried in triumph by the eager officials to a strict examination.

The examination appeared to be satisfactory, and very quickly a body of men, some with spades and pickaxes, others carrying a kind of litter, and a great many doing nothing, set out from the hotel of the Marquis. He himself accompanied them, and a priest walked behind him.

They reached a desolate looking piece of ground, enclosed with a wall, and entered by an iron gate. They went in, the man who had been examined walking first.

"You are sure this is the place?" said the Marquis to the latter.

"Signor, it is; I know it well."

"Good. Show us the spot."

He led the way to an obscure corner, and requested the men with the tools to remove some of the hard earth. They did so, and then the old man, kneeling down, scraped with his hands till four or five inches depth of gravel and mould were heaped on one side and brought to view a cross formed of bluish-coloured stones, deeply imbedded in the earth.

"See," he said, "it is here—underneath."

Those who looked at the Marquis observed that his face was deadly white, and he covered his eyes with his hand.

"Dig," he said at last.

The men fell to work. They were not long. The Marquis kept his head turned away all the time. At length the priest touched his arm.

"It is there, signor. Will you look?"

There was an open grave, and in it lay a small wooden coffin.

"Raise it," said the Marquis.

It was lifted out, and at a sign from him, opened. It contained but little, some fragments of discoloured clothing clinging round the bones of a skeleton. The priest murmured a prayer; the Neapolitans bared their

heads; the Frenchman did the same, but his face was hidden in his hands. With an effort at last he walked up close to the coffin, and looked in as if searching for something.

"Is it this, signor?" said the priest, gently moving the skeleton hand, and a ring of great brilliancy and curious design fell from the finger.

"It is that," said the Marquis, in a broken voice. "My search ends here. Give me the ring. You, Father, arrange the rest."

The coffin was closed again, placed on the litter, covered with a pall, and borne on men's shoulders. The priest walked in front, and the melancholy procession moved slowly back through the streets.

The coffin was carried into a church, the Marquis returned home, and the rest dispersed.

In the fading twilight of the spring evening, Madame de Meronne, still a beautiful woman, not forty years of age, sat with her two young daughters, and told them for the first time the object of their visit to Naples; told them the troubles and agonies of her youth, her husband lying under sentence of death, herself orphaned and helpless, their friends few and scattered, their enemies many and powerful; how a young girl, with

the face of an angel and the heart of a heroine, had stepped in between them and destruction ; with infinite skill and unwearying labour had saved them both, restored them to life, and liberty, and each other, and sent them safely away beyond the reach of danger. How, emigrating to the New World, they had lost sight of her and other cherished friends ; but that in their hearts the remembrance of all she had done remained as fresh as the events of yesterday ; every turn of her beautiful features, every word and look, written on their memory in characters over which time was powerless ; how at last, returning to France, and recovering rank, and wealth, and station, they had busied themselves to find out the after fortune of this pearl of humanity, and had learnt by a mere accident—the communication of a priest who had confessed a dying man—that she had died some mysterious death in the very prison from which she had delivered the Marquis, and was buried in a nameless, unhonoured grave, without prayer or blessing.

And then they had vowed by all they held holiest never to rest till that sacred dust had received the utmost that earth could give it of honour and reverence.

For this they had come. For this they had searched all Naples, armed with the

authority of power and wealth, till a clue was found, and the only living creature who could point out the unworthy resting-place of so much excellence was discovered. And this at last was done, and the honour due would be paid as far as it lay in mortal power to pay it.

"What was her name, mother?" asked the elder of the girls, "that we may remember it with a blessing."

"Her name is yours, my Nina. It was the only tribute we could then give her to call our child by her name, and hope that she might resemble her. All that can now be done we will do; but the mystery of her death will be an anguish to us for ever."

The third night after this a solemn ceremony took place in the principal church in Naples.

During those three days a coffin, richly ornamented, had stood before the high altar; innumerable lights burned round it, priests prayed and chanted over it, flowers and tears were showered on it from loving hands and eyes from sunrise to sunrise again unceasing. Thus, for three days and nights they mourned her—she, the twenty years dead.

At midnight High Mass was performed by the Bishop himself; the last service of the Church was chanted, and the coffin was borne slowly into a small, beautiful chapel, dedi-

cated to Our Lady of Pity, from which the altar stone had been removed and a vault prepared beneath.

There were but few spectators in the church, and they looked on awe-struck and wondering at the rich ceremonial, the lavish magnificence, for one whose name had never been heard.

The coffin was placed over the vault, the few mourners—four only—stood beside it. As they commenced to lower it Fleur-de-Lys knelt and kissed the head, and placed on it a wreath of rare white flowers, and while it descended her daughters threw in showers of the same kind, all sweet-scented and pure as snow; but the Marquis stood a little apart, neither speaking nor moving. The “*De Profundis*” pealed from the organ, the last prayer was said, the blessing given, the holy water sprinkled, the stone replaced, the ceremony was over.

The spectators quietly left. The mourners glided away, and were lost in distant shadows. The lights were extinguished, priests and choir disappeared, and left the church to darkness and silence, and the presence of those angels who watch the dust of the departed—the immortal spirits, love, memory, and hope!

A few days after the midnight burial a memorial pillar lifted its graceful height from

the spot where the coffin lay ; and the day following the French frigate sailed back to France, carrying her illustrious passengers, and they returned no more to Naples.

In a church in that city stands a monument remarkable for the rare purity of its marble. The form is simple—a broken column supported by a cross. On the pedestal, in letters of solid silver sunk into the stone, so that time should never efface them, these few words —

NINA DEI CASTELLANI RIPOSA IN  
ETERNA PACE.

(Nina of the Castellani rests in eternal peace.)

Thus ends the “Legend of the Hidden Picture.”

THE END.











